

## Chapter 1 X-mas 1991

Why am I writing in this journal? I don't trust journals. Every story I've read that a journal was mentioned, it ended up in the hands of the enemy to be used for humiliation and even blackmail.

Alright, according to the note, this special journal should allow you, my long lost brother Harry Potter, to see what I write and get to know me. Hopefully that means the people keeping you in hiding will eventually allow us to meet. Professor McGonagall didn't say anything about it one way or the other.

My name is Holly Evans, but I've been called many names. My favorites are 'Spider Girl' and 'Freak', with an honorable mention for 'The Little Dung-eating Crow'. I am writing to you from Hogwarts school for Witchcraft and Wizardry on Boxing Day, 1991. I'm a bit small for my age, especially compared to my friend Hermione. Her birthday is only a few days before mine (22nd September) and she's got about 5 inches on me. I have straight black hair which falls in my face a lot and green eyes, much like our Mum's according to Hagrid. He's really big, like 7 feet tall and wide, but he's kinda alright. He works as the groundskeeper here. Apparently he wishes he owned a dragon. (By the way, I don't actually eat dung, but I do like spiders)

I swear, the way I write you'd think I was a chatterbox but I normally don't talk much. I'll tell you what I know and hopefully it will help you understand.

Be glad you weren't left with the Dursleys. Mum's older sister Petunia lives in Surrey with her husband Vernon Dursley and their son Dudley. Petunia is really thin and has a sort of horse face, while Vernon and Dudley are just massive blobs. They hate me. They hate me more now that they have admitted that they knew I was to be a witch. They have been working to 'beat the freakishness out of me' since I can remember, but all that stopped when Professor McGonagall came to meet me at the end of July. Actually, it stopped a little before then, in May. I had gotten really mad at Dudley because he was beating up on Alison Gale for sharing her peanut butter sandwich with me. I just focused all that anger into my fist, like I saw in this comic book once, and I hit Dudley so hard he flew across the playground. His jaw was

broken, so they took him to hospital. I fainted after punching him, but the nurse took care of me. The next day the Dursleys moved me from my much smaller space into Dudley's second bedroom where usually he kept his broken toys. I was beginning to think maybe I was a hero, like in the comics. It would explain how I heal faster than other kids. I've had plenty of practice. Up until Prof. McG showed up I didn't know I was magical. Hell, I didn't know I was named Holly until I was six- up until then I was just 'Freak'.

I was placed with the Dursleys the day after our home was destroyed and Mum was killed. Apparently, it was important to hide you away for your safety, but no one even knew I existed. As best as Hermione and I have figured out, you were born 10 months after I was- yeah 'Irish twins'. That no one heard about it means that Mum may have had me due to an indiscretion. In case you don't follow, it means she had a baby with someone other than her husband, your dad James Potter. Don't fret though. I don't hold it against you, or against her. Somehow, I know absolutely that Mum loved me. That's important. It has helped me survive for the last ten years. Whenever I was feeling hopeless or defeated, I remembered that Mum loved me. I was feeling a bit of that when I decked Dudley.

So anyway, that's why I don't talk much. Talking draws attention, which almost never helps me.

I have a few friends here at Hogwarts. Hermione Granger is the closest, then Ron Weasley. No wait. First there's Hedwig, my snowy owl. Hagrid bought her for me as my first real (though belated) birthday present when Prof McG and I met him in Diagon Alley, the magical market in London. Since then, she's been my best bud. She spends a lot of time with me in the dorm, reading over my shoulder and making commentary. Snowy owls don't hoot- it's more a bunch of barks, clicks and snuffles, so Hedwig is quite the chatterbox. I met Ron next, on the train to Hogwarts. He's a redhead from a huge family of redheads. As the sixth boy in the family, he doesn't get much respect, but he seems to want to protect me for some reason, which is laughable as I will explain in a bit. I think he thinks of me like he does his little sister Ginny. Aside from protecting me and trying to copy homework from Hermione, he mostly eats and obsesses over Quidditch. It wasn't so bad until I was placed on the Gryffindor team

as a Seeker. Now he bends my ear constantly about the sport. I've learned how to grunt periodically to keep up his rhythm. It forestalls unnecessary talking.

Hermione is my other close friend. She is the daughter of dentists, with bushy brown hair. We live in the same room as two other Gryffindor girls, but we each had kept to ourselves at first. I don't know if you saw the Prophet article about the Troll at Hogwarts this past Halloween, but that was how I made actual friends with Hermione.

Ron was being a prat. He wasn't getting the levitation charm right and challenged Hermione to do it, which she did immediately. Hermione is brilliantly smart which pisses off Ron. Later I found out when we were at the feast that he said something cruel about her being friendless for her smarts and that she had holed up in a loo somewhere crying her eyes out over it. I grabbed Ron and dragged him there hoping to make him apologise. We didn't realise there was a troll around until we were in the loo with Hermione and the thing started to stink up the place. We all had to duck for cover when it swung this tree trunk of a club, smashing apart two of the privy stalls. Ron decided to be heroic and jumped on its back, sticking his wand up its nose. The troll tossed him out through the door into the hall. Ron's protective instincts are likely to end him quickly.

Anyway, Hermione used that levitation charm on the trolls club, while I had the inspiration to grab a broken slat of the stall door and transfigure it into steel, like our matchstick to needles exercise. When the troll swung his now empty fist at me, I shoved the metal shard into his neck. I think I used some of my 'Iron Fist' technique to get the point through its hide. Hermione dropped the club onto its head, which drove the shard the rest of the way through. I had sliced my hand open on the splinters from the shard and the troll had spilled out blood and guts all over me as it collapsed. I must have been quite the sight. I'll never forget this part: Hermione then said kinda shakily "It's a good thing we're in a loo". When I asked why she responded by running into the last intact toilet and heaving. I couldn't stop laughing. Here we are surrounded by wreckage, blood and troll goo and she makes sure to use a toilet. I laughed even louder when she flopped

over to floor and said "I suppose you think I shouldn't bother to flush?"

I don't think the professors appreciate my humor. They all looked quite aghast.

Christmas was interesting. I haven't had gifts before, and this time I got five interesting ones. The first was this journal and a letter from Prof. McG telling me about my relation to you. It isn't widely known that Holly Evans is the daughter of Lily Evans, mother to the Boy-Who-Lived. That may come out soon, so it makes sense that she would let me know before the press gets it. I'm not sure she knew before now. I think the headmaster knew, and I think that Professor Snape suspects. He's the potions professor and head of Slytherin house. As such, he is on a mission to destroy Gryffindors, but in general he just avoids looking at me, like I shouldn't exist. It's a familiar feeling for me so I let him be.

The second interesting gift was from Hermione. She left me her copies of Miranda Goshawk's standard book of spells for years 2 through 7. Apparently she's already read through them, as she was told about magic almost a year before she came to Hogwarts, on her 11th birthday. No wonder she is always so prepped. Of course, if she ran out of books she would memorise ingredient lists so it probably didn't change much for her grades.

The third interesting gift was a wooden flute from Hagrid. I started practicing on it today. Hedwig's helping.

The fourth interesting gift was from my Aunt Petunia of all people. She sent me two sex education books and the illustrated Kama Sutra. I would have taken this as some sort of attempt to fulfill her mothering duties, but she removed the appendix on birth control in the main volume. Silly bint forgot it was referenced in the index.

The last and most interesting gift was sent anonymously. It is an invisibility cloak, which Ron says is really rare. The attached note indicated that it was an heirloom, so the person holding it had felt compelled to return it to the family. Since it's magic, I doubt that it

would be an Evans heirloom. Maybe they couldn't get it to you so they gave it to me. I'll give it back when we finally meet.

Late last night I went out around the castle in the cloak, trying to see how well I could avoid the spiteful caretaker Mr. Filch and his cat Mrs. Norris. I ended up in an unused classroom and found this enchanted mirror there. When I looked at it, the image changed from it just being my head floating there (I still had the cloak mostly on) to a shadowy vision. This 'Mirror of Erised' apparently shows you your heart's deepest desire. The headmaster explained this as he appeared behind me. When I looked back, the image had changed- I could see me, standing next to you, I assume, with both of us standing in front of Mum. You were a little taller than me, wearing glasses, with shorter black hair and the same green eyes and the same lightning bolt scar on our forehead. Most folks don't see mine as my hair is in my face. I don't know if that's what you look like, but when I think of you that is what I'll imagine. The headmaster then went off on how we must not let our dreams prevent us from living our lives, and told me to not look for the mirror again. He's a creepy old man, and I think he was following me. I guess the cloak isn't invisible to everyone.

Oh, I forgot to mention. the first vision I saw in the mirror was of an adult me, but made of silvery steel and standing like a superhero, my robes flapping in the wind. I was holding three dog leashes made of chains that trailed down behind me to where the Dursleys were cowering, their faces full of shame and regret, dressed in rags.

I'm going to stop writing now, as I am getting a headache. I have been getting them since the welcoming feast, and it was worse after our Quidditch practices. The worst was the game. I almost passed out towards the end of the match, and ended up catching the snitch in my mouth. It hasn't been so bad since classes ended, and I only got a twinge of it when I was looking into the Mirror...

I'm an idiot.

I need glasses.

## Chapter 2: nice = dumb

5th January, 1992

Dear Harry,

Thank you for the loan. After my X-mas note I saw the healer Mme. Pomfrey about some eyewear. After ranting and scoffing at my lack of mentioning the headaches for about an hour (by which point I had a new one), she arranged for some temporary glasses and for a specialist to come to the school from Diagon Alley. Headmaster Dumbledore was there and said that you told him I could use some of the money from the Potter trust to pay for the glasses and some Quidditch goggles. Actually, Prof. McG nudged him to remind him about the goggles. I asked them where the money for my books and supplies came from, as Prof. McG never said anything about it when we went shopping back in July. They mumbled something about a Saladbar Foundation for indigent muggleborns. If you don't mind, I think it would be best to give back the money they used from this Foundation out of the Potter Trust. I don't want to owe someone else for this later. I'd rather owe you.

Holly

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Valentine's Day 1992

Dear Harry,

Neville Longbottom said something a while back about being thought a squib until his Uncle Algie threw him out a third floor window. Neville didn't break anything, he just bounced. Thank God for that as he has few advantages in this world. It's bad enough he can't remember even the simplest things like the password to the Gryffindor dorms, but he uses his Dad's wand instead of getting his own. Ollivander the weird wand guy said that the wand chooses the wizard, yet despite the Longbottoms being landed gentry and an old magical family to boot, his Gran won't spring for a properly matched wand. Hermione pointed out that lands and title didn't equal money.

Quoth Hermione; "His wouldn't be the first British noble family to be deep in debts. Just ask the Queen."

The reason I bring this up is that I think magical people do have powers. Mine shows up with the healing and the Iron Fist thing. I think it also allowed me to force my eyes to correct themselves, though it gave me headaches. Hermione has nearly absolute recall of what she's read. Another Gryffindor, Dean Thomas, has excellent drawing skills. In Ron's case, I think he has the capacity to eat as much as he can grab. I told Hermione my idea and she said it seems like the magic would rise to the occasion of the need, which for Neville was to not be splattered on the gravel. I gave him a Valentine. Hopefully he won't read too much into it.

Holly

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28th May, 1992

Harry,

I'm sorry I haven't written in a while, but it's been busy. Also, I don't usually like to write stuff down unless I'm really annoyed. Better, I think, to poison the page with my anger than poisoning my housemates, or Hagrid for that matter.

It's just that they are dumb. Nice, but dumb. I'm beginning to think nice people are inherently dumb. Dumb people aren't necessarily nice, as the Dursleys prove, but the other way makes some sense.

Prof. McG is stern and demanding. Mme. Pomfrey is stern and irritable. Professor Snape is positively ghoulish and 'snarky' (Hermione's new favorite word). They are all not nice, but definitely smart and capable. Hermione would say that she is the exception, but I haven't convinced her yet that telling people when they're wrong isn't actually nice. On the other hand, assuming my idea is right, she might get dumber if she started treating people kindly. I have to revise my original statement to say nice humans are dumb. I forgot about

Professor Flitwick and Firenze of the Centaurs. No wait. Prof. Flitwick is nearly as barmy as the headmaster and Firenze wasn't nice so much as cryptic but helpful.

Ron is Dumb.

Hagrid is dumb, a lot.

Lavender and Parvati are dumb, if only because Centaurs are not dreamy.

Draco is dumb, and also not nice. Also a coward, though in his case that may show some measure of smarts.

Dumbledore is dumb, which might excuse the name.

I'll tell the tale to explain what I mean.

Way back in September during our first flying lesson, Draco challenged Ron to a duel. As Ron was stepping into this supposedly to protect my honor I tagged along, hoping to bring him to hospital afterwards. It was a fake-out to get Ron in trouble with Filch, so we ran away, barely evading him by ducking into a third-floor room that we had been warned not to enter. Turns out the warning was valid, as there was a giant three-headed dog in there, standing on a trap door. Ron screamed, waking up the poor beastie and putting us at risk. We escaped. Ron is dumb.

Ron, Hermione and I visit Hagrid every few weeks to chat him up about life and creatures. Hermione had latched onto the idea that the trapdoor must lead to something, and that the break-in reported at Gringott's was somehow related to it. Hagrid eventually let out that he had retrieved what would have been stolen before the vault was violated, and that it was between Dumbledore and Nicholas Flamel. Hermione eventually worked out that Flamel created the Philosopher's stone, and that's what is hidden below Fluffy. Hagrid nicely confirmed that with his blustering.

Also, during the last few months Hagrid has been incubating an illegal dragon egg in his hut. It hatched a few weeks ago, upon which point



Norbert, a Norwegian Ridgeback, began to ignite and eat things, like Hagrid's beard, Hermione's book bag (for which I don't think she has yet forgiven him) not to mention biting Ron's hand. Thankfully, Ron had already contacted his second-eldest brother Charlie who works on a dragon reserve in Romania, so all we had to do was convince Hagrid his time as a dragon's mommy was at an end. When we finally pressed him about where he got the egg in the first place, he revealed that he won it in card game during which he told the other player (and now us) that Fluffy could be knocked out with music. He also revealed that further protections have been emplaced by the various professors, so we shouldn't worry, right? The man is a walking press leak. I am fairly sure that everything publicly known about Halloween 1981 came from him.

Anyway, Ron couldn't help with delivering Norbert to the Astronomy tower so that Charlie could do the pickup, so it fell to me, Hermione and a hastily recruited Neville. We traveled up there using the cloak to cover our movements. After the pickup, Draco busted us with Filch in tow. Neville, Hermione and I got detention and lost Gryffindor a bucket of points. Happily, Draco was included when Prof. McG handed down the punishment as Draco was out past curfew trying to catch us.

I should mention at this point that I have had plenty of other detentions. This is the only one I think is noteworthy because it illustrates my original point.

For our detention, Hagrid took us out to the Forbidden Forest.

The Forbidden Forest.

Hagrid was concerned about unicorns being attacked and drained of blood out in the Forbidden Forest. His brilliant plan was to have four firsties and his cowardly boarhound Fang accompany him in his search for the thing in the Forbidden Forest that could actually catch a unicorn with the intent of draining their blood. I am not a fearful person, but I try to avoid useless damage. The thing I encountered in the Forbidden Forest with its face dripping of silvery unicorn blood was like something from Tales from the Crypt. I would be having nightmares about it but something else happened then. As the thing

charged at me I was knocked over from behind. When I sat up to see what happened, I discovered that a centaur was standing over me, chasing the thing away. More specifically, I was sitting directly under Firenze's quite impressive fur-covered twitching Man...uhh, Horse-parts. They're bigger than my leg. It was distracting. After the creature retreated, Firenze stepped forward, turned around and spoke about some stuff. I honestly can't remember what he said.

Firenze had a bit of a row with some of his fellows until Hagrid found us. Hagrid and I burned the unicorn's body and buried the ashes. Hermione, Neville, Draco and Fang had already been led back to Hagrid's hut when Draco had panicked earlier causing us to split up in the first place.

Needless to say, Hagrid is dumb.

Whatever that thing in the Forbidden Forest was, it's still out there. Hermione thinks it may be gunning for Flamel's stone. Dumbledore is dumb. He's hidden a priceless artifact that grants youth and money in a school full of kids, and then told them where to start looking. He employed his most gullible servant to act as courier and first line of defense. He's engaged an acting company's worth of his most competent peers to hide and protect this same 'secret' item, luring whatever would want it to assault the school while in session. I'm surprised he's not selling tickets to the confrontation. They say power corrupts, but I think it just rots the brain.

I just remembered what Firenze was trying to say. It's Voldemort out there in the woods. Dumbledore is really, really dumb.

Holly

### Chapter 3: Getting a Head

30th May, 1992

Dear Harry,

While Hermione and I wait for the headmaster to abandon the castle and lead us all to ruin, I'd like to share a conversation I just had with Prof McG that I find illuminating. I am not a stenographer, so bear with me.

"Prof McG?"

"Miss Evans, I have told you in the past that you should respect me enough to use my full name."

"Sorry. Deputy Headmistress Madame Professor Doctor McGonagall, ma'am?"

I think she sighed then. "Yes, Miss Evans?"

"What would have happened if I said I didn't want to go to Hogwarts?"

"Why wouldn't you want to come here? I would have thought you were relieved to come here, given the circumstances."

"I was. I am. That's not the question."

"What is the source of the question, my dear?"

"Coming here may have been a mistake. There are dangers here I never imagined. Also, I think that Volde..."

"Don't say his name!"

"...dedoodah, um, might be trying to get here. To get in. Soon."

Prof. McG gave me the bad-homework stare for a full minute. I pushed forward.

"So what if I said I didn't want to come? Better yet, what would have happened if Hermione's parents didn't believe you about the magic and all and said 'Go away, you freak!' and so Hermione couldn't come. What would happen?"

"Miss Evans, the Grangers were very understanding of the situation, and my demonstration of transfiguration quite easily convinced them of the truth about magic."

"Yes, but not everyone could possibly be so accepting of it. What happens then?" I said that very insistently. Prof McG looked at me a while longer and then offered me a biscuit from a tin on her desk.

"Well, Miss Evans, hopefully Professor Binns has covered the Statutes of Secrecy in History this year. You may wish to read deeper into the topic as your schedule permits."

"I did. From what I gather, in the situation I described with Hermione's parents, they and Hermione would all be charmed to not remember anything about your conversation, possibly about any accidental magic incidents as well."

"Yes, quite."

"So then what happens the next time Hermione started to use her magic?"

"There is a Department of the Ministry that sends out squads to cover for such incidents. They are kept quite busy, I assure you."

I forget the rest of the conversation, but the biscuits were tasty.

So it's Hogwarts or bust. If I don't want to hang out with the nice but dumb people who are likely to get me killed, I'll be back in Surrey where Vernon can get the job done at his own pace. There's also something very disconcerting about an entire department of the government dedicated to changing people's perception of what is real. They are called Obliviators. It means our memories aren't safe on their own. Anything you believe may be altered to suit the desires of someone more powerful than you, at the Ministry's direction. I'm

beginning to think that writing to you in this journal may be a smart thing after all. I just need to find a way to make it safe, and difficult to modify. This looks like a job for Hermione, once exams are done. Hyperventilating over exam prep has caused her to faint twice already. I need her brain cells to recover before we start a new project. Besides, we may not live through June.

Holly

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8th June, 1992

Dear Harry,

I have been out for a bit. This past week has been a surreal haze of nightmares about killer plants, giant chess sets, flying keys and a man with two heads. Unfortunately, those things actually happened.

Professor Dumb left the building. Hermione, Ron and I knew that meant the game was afoot. After explaining Sherlock Holmes to Ron for the third time, we made our way to Fluffy's door, hoping to head off the bad guys at the pass. Two things became obvious to me then. One; someone was already past Fluffy. Two: the next time I want to save the world, I'll skive off exams and get a head start.

I won't go into the specifics. We made it past a mess of obstacles set up to allow us firsties to make it through, although Ron got pummeled by the Chess pieces- a small amount of poetic justice given how he abuses the pieces in his chess set. Hermione was stuck at the last task, for only one of us could go forward. She suggested that I should go, despite her voluminous spell knowledge. Her argument was simple, and I couldn't deny it.

"I am just books and cleverness; there are more important things, like friendship and bravery and..."

"And?"

"Well, a killer instinct. You don't flinch, Holly."

I guess I must have looked a little sad as I nodded my head, because Hermione gave me a hug to compete with the strangling vine just then. It took me a minute, but I finally relaxed into it. I hope someone gives you hugs, Harry. They make you feel like you can do anything. Hermione gave me one last piece of advice before she turned to go back.

"Don't you die in there. I would feel severely put out."

Short version of what followed:

Voldemort had been occupying the back of Professor Quirrel's head, when he wasn't feasting on Unicorns. They were confounded by the Mirror of Erised, convinced that it was somehow the key to getting the stone. When I wouldn't tell them anything about it, they used this pain-inducing curse on me. After a few minutes of that fun, Voldemort took full control of Quirrel and dragged my head up to look directly in my eyes. He noticed my scar and started to say something so I took the opportunity to shove the Philosopher's Stone into his mouth. The Stone had dropped into my hand as I was looking in the mirror, but they hadn't noticed it as it's about the size of a small egg. With Quirrell-mort occupied with choking on his prize, I gave him an Iron Fist uppercut right in the jaw. That's when his head exploded.

He killed Mum, but I killed him back, Harry.

Between the 'Crucio!'s, the Iron Fist and having chunks of stone and skull lodged into my arm and face, I got knocked out. When I woke up, it was four days later. My glasses were pulverised, but my eyes are fine. I just pulled a sliver of the Stone from my right lower leg and forced the cut to heal itself. Maybe I'll use the sliver as a bookmark.

Headmaster Dumbledore is here. I'm already getting a headache from healing my leg, so I might as well see what he has to say. I'll let you know what comes of it.

"Holly. How are you feeling?"

"Well enough, sir. Madame Pomfrey has pulled out all the pieces and patched me up quite well."

"Holly, you should look up when speaking to people. It shows respect."

"All due respect, sir, but my glasses got crunched and focusing on people is hurting my eyes."

The headmaster seemed to get momentarily flustered by this. He then conjured up a plush velvet chair next to my bed and sat down.

"I'd like to discuss what happened to put you in here, and perhaps answer some questions you may have about these events."

"Alright."

I think he was expecting me to start explaining myself. I learned from Vernon never to offer up reasons to be punished, so I waited for the headmaster to choose the topic.

"Well, from what your friends have mentioned, you went to stop Professor Snape from stealing the Philosopher's Stone. You were able to make it to the last room and had to leave Miss Granger to inform us of the grave situation, then forged ahead to confront the intruder yourself."

"Ron and Hermione thought it was Professor Snape. I just knew the Stone was at risk."

"And you found Professor Quirrel there instead."

"Yes, sir."

"And when he put you in front of the Mirror of Erised, the Stone appeared to you."

"Yes, sir."

The headmaster pulled back in his chair with a self-satisfied smirk at that point.

"That was my little trick. You see, only a person with the best intentions, who had a need for the Stone, but without any desire to use it, could get the Stone from the Mirror. That was one of my more ingenious ideas, and not to sound arrogant, but that is really saying something."

I stared at him a moment then looked back down to the blanket.

"Well, good on you then."

Dumbledore's eyes twinkle sometimes, but at this point I think I doused his twinkle.

He harrumphed. "Yes, well, please continue."

"Well, Quirrel got frustrated from not getting the Stone, and he pulled off his turban to reveal a second face in the back of his head. The second face told him I knew about the Mirror and suggested he torture me to get me to talk."

"And when he touched you, he started to burn."

"Um, no. Quirrel pulled out his wand and yelled Crucio at me a couple times. It felt like being electrocuted and dumped in freezing water at the same time."

"What?"

"Yeah, after the first time it didn't seem as bad." I was bluffing a bit at this point. Crucio is horrifyingly intense. I really had the headmaster's attention now.

"So...you don't remember anything after that?"

"Of course I do. The back face seemed to get frustrated with Quirrel's driving and kinda swiveled into place in the front. He grabbed me by the head and started to say something, so I shoved the Stone in his



mouth. He started choking on it, and so I concentrated all my anger and hatred into my fist and let him have it. I guess it broke the Stone, because his head blew up."

I can't quite figure out why I told him the full truth just then. I think I looked up at him when he got all surprised about the Crucio thing. I remember turning my head back down to the blanket at that point though.

"Am I going to go to jail, headmaster?"

"No, I have already explained to the Ministry that Professor Quirrel was killed trying to steal a precious artifact from the school. I imagine at this point the students will know of your involvement in these matters, but you shouldn't concern yourself about their opinions. You did the...right thing."

I don't think he was convinced of that himself, but I wasn't up to caring at that moment. I needed to make sure of our victory.

"It was Volde...it was him, right? The one that killed my Mum? I want to make sure he's dead now."

"Yes, it was Voldemort, but I don't believe he's dead. His spirit survived that night when he took your mother Lily's life and that spirit is what possessed Professor Quirrel. Voldemort may have been defeated this time, but I believe he will be back. You see, Lily's sacrifice provided a protection for your brother, Harry that night. Voldemort couldn't take Harry's life and the Killing curse he used was reflected back onto him. But Voldemort has some other protections of his own, that prevent his permanent departure from this earth so while his body died his spirit remained. I am trying to ascertain how he has accomplished this. Eventually, I may need your help to remove those protections, and to bring about Voldemort's end."

Well, fuck me. Sorry, Harry. I'll try harder next time.

"I notice you don't have any problem saying...his name, sir."

"No, I don't and you shouldn't either. Always use the proper name for things. Fear of a name only increases fear of the thing itself."

"I'm not afraid; it just seemed to annoy Prof. McG earlier."

"When did you discuss Voldemort with Professor McGonagall, Holly?"

"I mentioned to her a week ago that I thought Voldemort might be trying to get in to the castle."

"And what made you think that?"

"I remembered Firenze saying that only something with a desperate need would drink Unicorn blood. He implied that Voldemort was desperate enough, and likely to be in the area."

"And you didn't think to mention this directly after your excursion?"

OK, at this point he really started to bug me.

"Uh, no. I was distracted by visions of Firenze's giant horse cock."

"Miss Evans, that is entirely uncalled for!"

"It's the truth! Besides, you just said I should use the proper names for things."

"The truth." Dumbledore sighed. "It is a beautiful and terrible thing, and should therefore be treated with great caution."

"Well, yeah. It was really distracting."

Dumbledore huffed and grumbled a bit then. "Yes, well, it is unfortunate that in your altercation that the Philosopher's Stone was shattered."

"I really feel bad about that sir. What will the Flamels do now? Can they still use the pieces?"

"I wouldn't worry too much about that, Holly. Nicholas and I had come to an agreement recently, that the Stone was too tempting to be left intact during these troubled times. They have enough of the elixir of life to set their affairs in order. I believe they may welcome death after all this time. After all, to the well-organised mind, death is but the next great adventure. You know, the Stone was really not such a wonderful thing. As much money and life as you could want! The two things most human beings would choose above all - the trouble is, humans do have a knack of choosing precisely those things which are worst for them."

After that long-winded bit, I begged off as being tired and the headmaster left me to rest.

I wrote a letter of apology to the Flamels. Despite the headmasters take on things, I felt really bad about breaking their Stone. I gave the letter and the piece of Stone from my leg in an envelope to Hedwig. When I explained where she was to go, she looked at me and let out a long low gurgle. I think the translation would be 'This may take some time, and I won't be there for you at the Dursleys'. Either that or she's got indigestion and doesn't think I feed her enough.

Harry, there is too much going on here that doesn't add up. I'm going to bring Hermione up to speed and set her on my privacy needs for this journal. If there's anything I can tell you as a big sister that may help you in this life, it's to make sure you find out the truth from others, but protect your truths until you need them. The headmaster is right about that bit at least. The truth and Firenze's package are both to be treated with caution.

Holly

## Chapter 4: Indentured Servitude

20th June, 1992

Dear Harry,

I don't smile much. It just doesn't happen very often, probably because things haven't been worth smiling about. I think after I popped Quirrel-mort's head like a balloon I must have smiled before I got knocked out, but there were no witnesses. I'll just smile about it now to make up for it.

I think Hermione just noticed, because she's staring at me with concern again. I am writing this as we ride the Express back to London, and every mile we travel I move farther from the magical world. We can't do magic away from school until we are 17, and have passed at least 3 OWL exams to certify that we have our powers under control. When Hermione told me this during the leaving feast, I decided to swap out her collection of Goshawk books in my trunk for all the dry foods I could steal from the table and stuff into my book bag. Without magic I will have no defense at the Dursleys. Even the Iron Fist might trigger a citation. My only hope at the moment is that Petunia's Xmas gifts weren't sent to prep me for Dudley's sexual awakening. At the time, I couldn't even fathom what she was thinking, but talking with Hermione about it earlier gave me the idea that Petunia is hoping some wizard gets me pregnant due to my experimenting with forbidden knowledge, which might end their responsibility for me that much earlier. I can just imagine Uncle Vernon biting his tongue while insisting that a cowering Neville Longbottom 'do the right thing for his niece's honor'. Not that I have a thing for Neville, it's just that he's the most likely person from the wizarding world I could see cowering before my Uncle.

Holly

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22nd June, 1992

Dear Harry,

The only good news I have to report is that Dudley hasn't started looking at girls sexually yet. Or maybe just not me, which is fine either way. He continues to express himself with his fists. I had cause to smile again today, though. Dudley noticed me wearing my Quidditch goggles while out working in the flower beds and stole them from me while I was wiping dirt from my face. He's been trying to break them for the last hour, but Hermione's Impervious charm seems to be holding up quite well.

Aunt Petunia confronted me about the goggles when Dudley complained that they were magical. I explained that I had needed glasses for a while now and had gotten a pair of normal glasses plus these prescription sport lenses while at school, but that the normal ones were broken at the end of term. Aunt Petunia then snorted and said something about appreciating the gift she sent after all. I guess she didn't actually read the sex manuals before sending them along. Aunt Petunia was implying that my vision problems were due to excessive masturbation, which is quite specifically debunked as a myth in Chapter 4. In case you haven't gotten any advice in this area, allow me a moment of sisterly care: make yourself happy in the privacy of your room to your heart's content. Not only is it perfectly natural, but in some philosophies releasing built up sexual tension this way is good for your body's chemical and emotional balance. Any questions about technique should be directed elsewhere, as I can't draw for shite and you've already seen how poor my descriptions are. Also, I only have Firenze's penis to use as an example for scale and that, as I understand it, is simply unfair to you.

Holly

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Dear Harry,

I have been here over a month. No Hedwig. No books (other than Aunt Petunia's gifts, which is where I stuck this journal to make sure I would have it). Obviously no wand or broom. I haven't heard from Hermione or Ron or Neville or anyone. All my stuff including Hedwig's cage and the trunk with the food in it was locked in the cupboard

under the stairs after the goggle argument was retold to Uncle Vernon. I've never wanted to be back in that cupboard so badly. I used to sleep there, before last year. It was uncomfortable and stuffy and the nails through the lower steps would poke my feet when I turned in my sleep. But it was mine, and I watched the spiders there spin webs and capture other insects to eat. It was fascinating. There aren't any spiders in my room, just a mattress, a rickety table and desk chair, my cheap sewing machine I use to make Dudley's old clothes wearable for me and a bunch of Dudley's broken toys. I am cooking and cleaning and gardening and sewing from dawn til I collapse, just like I would do any previous summer. I am tired and I feel weak, probably from the limited food I get now. I am beginning to feel like this whole past year was some sort of hallucination.

In fact, now I'm seeing a two foot tall bug-eyed leprechaun.

Hang on...

Holly

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31st July, 1992, later that night

Well, that was bizarre, but I'd say I feel a whole lot better now. By the way, Happy Birthday. I had lost track of the days until Dobby told me. Dobby is the name for the leprechaun I thought I had imagined, but he's not a leprechaun, Dobby is a House-Elf. I don't know if I'll ever see him again, but he made my day.

I'll try to be descriptive for this one.

Dobby is about 30 inches tall and looks like a Bobble-Head doll made out of leather. His ears look bat-like and his eyes are the size of grapefruits. His body is spindle-thin as are his arms and legs, with huge floppy feet and long hands that I swear have an extra set of joints. He quivers almost constantly, though as he was in my room on a mission, it could be that he was more nervous than normal. All he was wearing was a dirty ancient pillowcase with a monogram in the corner that said LCM.

Dobby has an odd way of speaking so I'll try to get the conversation right.

"Is you...is you the Holly Evans, who slays the troll at Hoggy Hogwarts last Halloween?"

"Sometimes I think so. What are...who are you, exactly?"

"I is being called Dobby. Just Dobby. Dobby the house-elf."

"How did you get here?"

"Dobby has come to you Miss Holly, because house-elves cannot find the Great Harry Potter."

"Yes, but how did you get here?"

"Dobby used his magic to find Miss Holly and come to her room."

"So you can do magic that won't get me in trouble with the Ministry?"

"Dobby mustn't be doing bad things, or any things that aren't for the family..."

"Dobby, if you need my help I'm going to need just a little of your help."

"What must Dobby do?"

"There's a space under the stairs that has my things, and I need them. Can you get them for me without letting the other people know?"

In the next 30 seconds, my salvation literally appeared in front of me in the form of my trunk with Dobby standing nervously beside it. I cracked open the latch, flipped open the lid and then slumped down to sit on the floor with an apple tart stuffed into my mouth.

"Sit down Dobby, we're having a picnic!"

At this point he went a little hysterical. I thought it was for helping me out but he actually doesn't have much self-esteem is all.

"Dobby has never been asked to sit down by witch or wizard, I-I-like an equal! And to eat food with them! Bad Dobby! Bad Dobby!"

It took me a minute to calm him down and get him talking quietly again.

After we sat and munched for a bit, Dobby explained his mission to me.

"Terrible things are coming this year to Hogwarts. The family forbade Dobby from talking to other house-elves, or to Hogwarts Professors, or to any adults who might interfere..."

"So that's why you came looking for Harry?"

"Yes miss. Dobby is wanting to warn away the Great Harry Potter, but Dobby cannot speak about what the family doesn't want told."

"Well, you could try to give me a hint and I could take care of it."

"Holly Evans is valiant and bold! She has braved so many dangers already! But Dobby has come to warn Harry Potter and now his Holly Evans, even if he does have to shut his ears in the oven door later... Holly Evans and Harry Potter must not go to Hogwarts."

"What do you mean, about the oven door?"

"Dobby will have to punish himself most grievously for coming to see you, miss. Dobby will have to shut his ears in the oven door for this. Dobby is always having to punish himself for something, miss. They lets Dobby get on with it, miss. Sometimes they reminds me to do extra punishments..."

"But why don't you leave? Escape?"

"A house-elf must be set free, miss. And the family will never set Dobby free...Dobby will serve the family until he dies."



"Is that why you wear that rotted old sack?"

"This, miss?" said Dobby, plucking at the pillowcase. "'Tis a mark of the house-elf's enslavement, miss. Dobby can only be freed if his masters present him with clothes, miss. The family is careful not to pass Dobby even a sock, miss, for then he would be free to leave their house forever."

I suddenly realised that Dobby's situation wasn't too different from my own, aside from school. The only difference between us being that my service is an indentured servitude. I need only survive another four years or so and my chains will be broken. Dobby's chains will hold him until he's dead.

I gave him a bit of a fright when I hugged him tightly. He reminded me of myself again when he stayed stiff for a minute and then relaxed into the hug, much as I had when Hermione hugged me before I confronted Quirrel-mort. I haven't cried like that since I was five. Dobby cried too after a bit, probably worried that he had upset me, but I wouldn't let him go for a long time.

Yeah, your sister the troll-slayer is a weepy wreck. Worse still, I'm a liar. Dobby wouldn't leave until I promised him I would stay away from Hogwarts and warn you to stay away as well. Consider yourself warned. Smashing birthday present, eh?

Holly

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3rd August, 1992

Dear Harry,

Now that I've had a few days of food, books and hope thanks to Dobby, I would take some journal space to tell you about other people I've met. Aside from my classmates, I mostly spend time with the Gryffindor Quidditch team. They're a good lot, though I don't think they know what to do with me.

The first one I met was our team captain Oliver Wood. He takes Ron's amateur Quidditch obsession to a professional level. Oliver plays keeper for the squad, and has a tendency to be knocked unconscious during matches. When awake, his keeping skills are excellent, which is probably why the opposing beaters always aim for him.

The next group is our trio of chasers, all girls. I like our Quidditch chasers. Angelina, Alicia and Katie are popular with the boys, particularly when teasing me about my height, lack of development, shoddy clothing and messy hair and at the end of term, they blamed me for Gryffindor losing the Quidditch cup this year by being all unconscious and unavailable. Such honesty makes me swell with pride. My theory stands; they are not nice or dumb. Plus they value me as a player. Obviously if it's my fault we lost when I wasn't there, it must be my talent that we win when I am there.

Yes, I am feeling much better. Thank you.

Our team is rounded out by Fred and George Weasley, Ron's next oldest brothers. They are twins, and have a habit of speaking part of each other's sentences. This ties back into my powers of magic theory- I think they communicate from a shared hive mind. They are known pranksters, so they may have developed this talent by needing to keep their opposite aware of shared alibis and such. It shows in their beating skills, as they volley the bludgers with a scary amount of coordinated accuracy. I wonder if it is affected by range.

Then there's Ron.

I mean literally- he and the twins are floating outside my window in a light blue Ford Anglia.

Time to pack!

Holly

## Chapter 5: Meet the Weasleys

4th August, 1992

Dear Harry,

I think if I were asked to describe a magical place to someone else, I would choose the Weasleys home, which they call the Burrow. Hogwarts is great and all, being a castle in the remote north and surrounded by a dark forest filled with lethal neighbors, but if I wasn't trying to frighten someone, the Burrow is the right place to call magical. My first impression might throw you off, but here goes:

"What a piece of junk!"

Now if you haven't seen a muggle film called Star Wars (and I haven't actually, I've just heard it played through so many times on the video player in Dudley's room I nearly have it memorised) this is actually me being funny.

Never mind.

The Burrow is like twenty shacks sewn together with plywood and magnets. Inside, it rises to four stories to hold the rooms for two adults, seven children and some moaning creature in the attic that is 'mostly harmless'. The kitchen has little shelves tacked up wherever a wall seems to have grown into place. The dishes wash themselves. There is a clock that isn't actually a clock, with a spoon-shaped hand for each family member, alternately indicating their status, like 'Home', 'Work', 'School', 'Traveling', 'Mortal Peril' and the like. Nothing there would set the mind of a muggle at ease. I love it.

Ron and the twins decided to initiate my jailbreak last night after noting that none of Ron's messages to me were being delivered. It took them a while to decide something was wrong because their owl, Errol is on his last...wings and often gets lost on parcel assignments. Nevertheless, I told them I was grateful. I even gave Ron a full-face show-my-teeth smile. Ron knows my tendencies and took it for the important message it was; he's done good.

I am now going to catch up on lost sleep here in Ginny's room. My brief introduction to her suggests that when fully awake she will be quite chatty, so for the sake of her life and my continued liberation, I'm going to get as much sleep as I can.

Holly

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5th August, 1992

Dear Harry,

I was right about Ginny. She is very chatty once forced into full awake-ness. Despite my insistence that I haven't met you, she has occupied my entire morning with questions and ruminations about your life in hiding. Ginny is fairly sure the two of you will be married once she graduates Hogwarts, unless you decide to go for the secret romantic elopement the second she turns 14, when Wizarding society allows for a marriage contract. You lucky guy. She's cute, in a short undeveloped girl with straight long hair way. (Well, that actually kinda describes me but with red hair. I'll have to find a picture at some point. We really aren't that similar.) Despite my amusement at her antics, I haven't said much about anything to her. I believe my longest sentence was:

"Still, you should work out some kind of other career goals just in case."

I know, I rule.

After lunchtime, the twins rescued me from Ginny's fantasmagorical romance land by poking me with sticks. They were using their brooms, of course, but being poked by sticks was actually their point.

"Are we safe my brother?"

"Is it going to eat us?"

"Surely our Seeker isn't truly evil, or she would have abandoned us in our hour of need."

"Which she actually did, my brother."

"Please guys, I got this from Angelina on the train."

"Ah, but you are obviously unaware of our little brother's new celebrity status."

"Certainly I wouldn't want to rely on him to defend us from your blood sacrifices"

"Even if you have your famous brother fighting for you"

I finally got the point (Ha!) and asked them to explain; "Hang on, how did you guys and Ginny find out Harry and I are related?"

"..And the Prophet shall speak to them."

"Yea, verily!"

At this point Fred and George thrust forward two articles extracted from the Daily Prophet that I missed during my incarceration. Apparently Ron's a hero, and even I am famous now. Infamous.

Excerpt from Daily Prophet, 21st June, 1992

Dead Professor a criminal; pureblood boy defends the castle

Recent events at Hogwarts School for Witchcraft and Wizardry have been uncovered, revealing that the death of Defense against the Dark Arts Professor Quirinus Quirrel was actually due to his participation in a failed theft. The Professor ran afoul of some plucky and enterprising students in his attempt to steal a valuable magical artifact from Hogwart's secure dungeons. First year student Ronald Bilius Weasley, a Gryffindor accompanied by two other female students, was able to flummox the false professor's felonious filching. Mr. Weasley is the youngest son of Arthur Weasley, of the Ministry's

Misuse of Muggle Artifacts Office, who was said to be quite proud of his son's courageous...

That one is funny. Ron was cornered by the reporter in hospital while I was having my skin repaired. Now he's eating up the attention from his mother and the letters from fans that come in every couple days, though the twins have been teasing him constantly about his 'pluck'. I could care less for the fame as I'd rather avoid the scrutiny, but I think when Hermione returns from France, he's going to get an earful about us 'accompanying' him like backup singers.

My own claim to fame is a bit more disturbing, as it should be I suppose. This was published on Dudley's birthday; the day after Dudley tried to break my goggles. I should cut out an extra copy to give to him.

Excerpt from Daily Prophet, 23rd June, 1992

Harry Potter's sister discovered; illegitimate elder daughter of hero's muggleborn mother may have Dark Tendencies

Our Prophet reporters pride themselves on getting the full story, and in that interest we provide a follow-up on the report published November 1st, 1991 concerning the mountain troll that was let into the hallowed halls of Hogwarts only to be slain by prompt attention of Hogwart's staff. It has been revealed that when the troll was confronted and vanquished, it was in the company of first year student Holly Evans, who appeared at the conclusion of the incident laughing maniacally, covered in troll blood and having cut her own hand during the altercation. Further research by our reporters discovered that Holly Evans is the daughter of Lily Evans Potter, thought to be the last victim of He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named before he was destroyed by the infant Harry Potter. Miss Evans is only 10 months older than the Boy-Who-Lived and thus still a student, so we approached her magical guardian Albus Dumbledore for comment. Unfortunately, the Chief Warlock was unavailable in time for publication.

Yeah, that's about right. At this point I'm surprised Mrs. Weasley let me in the Burrow. Ron apparently explained the true situation to her,

as well as Prof McG who was here a few nights back to talk with Ginny about attending Hogwarts. I suspect Prof McG made a bigger impression, which may be a more believable reason why it took the boys until now to break me out. As it is Mrs. Weasley is pleasant enough but always keeps one eye on me. Percy, the eldest Weasley child still at home, also gives me the evil eye when he's around, but the twins use him as the target of most of their pranks so he stays in his room a lot.

To brighten my drop in mood from the articles, the twins played a homemade version of follow the leader with me on our brooms.

Holly

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6th August, 1992

Dear Harry,

Hedwig's back! I missed her so much you have no idea. What's even better is she brought a letter and package from Nicholas Flamel. I won't go into the details here, but he was very appreciative of the letter I sent, and the fragment of his stone. There wasn't anything he could do to remake it, as the original was forged partly by accident, but it proved to him that his Stone was the one that was destroyed. In gratitude, Mr. Flamel sent along one of his wife Perenelle's notebooks about memory charms. Apparently, she created a magical device called a Pensieve that can allow you to store and review your memories, 'a testament to her expertise in the subject'. After 600 years I would expect that memory spells would be necessary to retain any semblance of sanity. I'm sure the headmaster is feeling the strain already. My problem now is that the book is sealed with some sort of sliding puzzle cover made of runes, I think. I suppose this is to make sure that I'm ready for the knowledge. I'll put Hermione on it whenever she returns from France and finishes kicking Ron's arse.

In the meantime, Hedwig and I are going to cuddle, then go flying.

Holly

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11th August, 1992 - Ginny's 11th birthday

Dear Harry,

I encountered another facet of Ginny's personality today, which led to a meaningful discussion with Ron. I guess I cared a bit more about that first Prophet article than I thought.

The twins decided to give Ginny two gifts for her birthday this year, both of them jumpers. When she tried on the second one it 'developed' a set of enormous breasts underneath, to the point where Ginny was having trouble sitting upright. By the time she had freed herself from the overshirt, they had escaped out to the garden and were flinging vegetables and garden gnomes at her to deter pursuit. As Ron and I followed outside to watch the mayhem, Ginny stormed back into the house. The next thing I saw both twins were struggling on the ground with some sort of slime thing attacking their faces. Somehow she had stolen Percy's wand and hit them with a powerful jinx, which Ron told me she had perfected earlier this summer.

"Yeah, that's the Bat-Bogey Hex. Ginny's bleedin' scary when she wants to be. Reminds me of you a bit I 'spose."

"She's learned a hex and she isn't even in school yet? That's talent. So, is that why you decided to be my protector this past year?"

"Well, um, yeah...."

I turned to him and locked eyes.

"Ron, as my friend you've got to learn something. If you're going to hold secrets, you must learn not to give away that they exist. I now know that you know more about this than you have told me."

"Sorry, Holly."

"Don't apologise for this, just learn, yah?"



"OK"

"So what was the other reason?"

"Dad asked me to look after you. He said you'd be on the train and that you wouldn't know anyone, but that it was important you know about us and the Malfoys and stuff."

Hmmm. That was making me think. I hadn't noticed Ron getting uppity until he spoke again.

"I suppose you know all about secrets, then."

"What?"

"You've known you were Harry Potter's sister all this time and didn't say a thing to me!"

"Yes, Ron?"

"Well, don't you trust me?"

"Like, trust you to tell the truth to the press? Trust you to correct people's mistakes about how their lives were saved from a possessed teacher? No, Ron, I don't trust you like that. I don't trust first; I wait to see how people act, and then choose how close I can allow them to get."

Ron looked appropriately sullen and guilty, so I threw him a bone.

"Look Ron, I like that you want to protect me, and I love that you came for me on a shiny steed. As far as the fame and attention are concerned, you're welcome to it."

He brightened up a bit at that.

"Just remember, what really happened that makes everyone mistakenly call you a hero is truly known by several important people, aside from us."

"Who?"

"Well, the headmaster for one, as he recovered me from the last room. Hermione, as she made it farther than you did, and I told her what else happened afterwards. And of course, Harry Potter."

He blanched a little at that point. I think your reputation is intact. I held up this journal.

"I got this last Christmas you'll remember. Everything I write in here is also written in a copy Harry reads. He can't write back, but Harry knows lots about what has been going on, if only from me."

(Of course, I hope you get more info than just what I tell you.)

"More secrets, then..." Ron grumbled.

"Yes, Ron. Besides, it seems to me that secrets are making you very popular right now."

"Oh, yeah!"

Nice but dumb.

Holly

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19th August, 1992

Dear Harry,

I just had the most fun day. The Weasleys and I went to Diagon Alley to shop for school, but it wasn't the shopping that made it fun- I'm just not that girly.

The first time I went to Diagon Alley, Prof McG teleported us there, though she called it Apparation. It was really uncomfortable, like being sucked through a straw, but it's really efficient. This time, owing

to the fact that most of us going were underage, we used the Floo system, a magically interconnected network of fireplaces. The trick in Floo-ing is to clearly speak your intended destination. That's where I screwed up.

I got distracted thinking about Diagon Alley, I mean, it really is an odd name, but then I put it together: diagon+alley

"Oh! Diagonally!"

Well that was an inconveniently timed revelation, as I was standing in the fire when I said it. Where I ended up wasn't the nicest place, but at least it wasn't a private home. I landed in a used books and curio shop called Borgin and Burke's, in a nearby maze of shops called Nocturne Alley (get it; nocturnally). I browsed through there for a bit until I realised I didn't have any money and left to get my bearings. I need to go back there sometime though. All the books there are older handwritten works, and probably aren't sanctioned and edited by the Ministry of Magic. It seems to me that the stuff we get from Flourish and Blott's is the stuff anyone would be alright to read, but that little shop holds treasures of knowledge, from people who pushed beyond that comfort zone. I just need to learn more about how it all works, so I can recognise if an author is actually brilliant or just crazy.

I bumped into Hagrid outside Borgin and Burke's and he led me back to the rest of the Weasleys, who were going spare with worry. He also dropped off a money pouch for me that Prof McG had pulled from the Potter trust. Thanks again for that, by the way. I'm embarrassed to say I hadn't considered that without that money, I would've been depending on the Weasleys to pay for my supplies, and they don't have a lot to spare.

My next reunion was the one I was anticipating the most, but it didn't turn out as well as I hoped.

As the Weasleys trooped into the already crowded bookstore, I was happily assaulted by a bronzed and bushy-haired flying missile named Hermione. I am totally a fan of hugs with Hermione. She puts her whole body into the action, and I was glad to reciprocate. I held her for while, then stepped back to take a look- apparently, France

agrees with her, as her tan was deep enough to rival Parvati's natural skin tone. Soon after, however, I lost her attention to a great Periwinkle Ponce.

"Hermione, I have missed you so much!"

"Holly, it's good to see you! Did you come today to meet Gilderoy Lockhart?"

Upon reflection, I am surprised she even stopped to say hello. Already her gaze had wandered to the bookstore window where over the crowd of students and women in attendance, she could see the curly-blond-haired celebrity. I tried to get Hermione's attention back using her natural puzzle-obsession.

"Hermione, did you figure out anything about securing my journal?"

"Hmm? Oh, yeah."

"Well?"

"We can use a secrecy charm."

"And what will that do?"

"What will what do?"

"The secrecy charm- what will it do?"

"Oh, it will obscure the content until you lift the charm."

"I won't be able to use that during summer, though."

"..."

"Hermione?"

"We should get in there, it looks like he might be speaking soon."

"HEY, Hermione!"

"Oh, Holly I just need to be close to him, he's so dreamy and nice..."

I think that 'nice' has become a trigger word for me. I pulled Hermione over to me away from the window and slapped her cheek, hard.

"SNAP OUT OF IT!"

Hermione's hand went to her stinging cheek and she focused her eyes back on mine. "What the hell was that for? What is wrong with you?"

"What's wrong with me? What's wrong with this picture?"

I pointed back towards the bookshop and we both saw the entire female population within gasp and sigh in unison as Lockhart switched stances and flashed a smile. "You're acting like one of the Pod People. I swear they're about to start a musical number in there! Oh, shit..."

Hermione was acting hurt but clear-minded as we rushed into the shop, trying to intercept Ron before he was dragged up next to Lockhart. There were just too many bodies in the way.

I won't detail the press conference that followed. In summary, Gilderoy is coming to Hogwarts to replace Quirrel as DADA professor. Ron had the presence of mind to say he couldn't relate the details of his heroic defeat of Quirrel for 'security reasons'. The Weasleys got a full collection of Gilderoy's works, which are also the DADA texts for all years this year. Hmm, 450 students times 10 books times 2 galleons per book. I don't think 'Professor' Lockhart is nice, as he isn't dumb. I'll have to explain my nice=dumb theory to Hermione and see how she feels about Lockhart then. I lost track of her as she went back to rejoin her parents. I didn't have time to worry about that, as I had to deal with a snake first.

"I suppose the Weasel loved that, all the undeserved attention."

I turned around to see the well-dressed Draco Malfoy ripping a page from one of Lockhart's books to wrap up his used chewing gum. I am

convinced he uses his magical powers to be permanently starched; clothes and hair alike. "Draco, are you feeling spurned?"

"Stuff it, Evans. I'm actually surprised the Weasels will be seen with you. Their star is rising and yet they still associate with a freakish orphan leftover like you. I always suspected your mother was just a mudblood whore."

I must have poked something tender for him to redirect his ire from Ron to me.

"Malfoy, are you familiar with the Hogwarts motto?" (It's 'it is unwise to tickle a sleeping dragon')

"Of course, you filth. Why?"

"Because I can only assume that you know my background from the Prophet article, and the article also suggests that I happily bathe in the blood of any trolls I've slain. Do you really think it's smart to provoke me?"

Draco didn't get a chance to respond, as his father had somehow incited a similar argument with Arthur Weasley, which had now just turned into a rugby brawl within the bookshop. I did my best to represent the Weasley clan by breaking Draco's nose with a copy of Gadding with Ghouls, but mostly I just used the tables to duck from flying combatants. The twins and I concluded later that much of the brawl came from jealous women all vying to protect Lockhart from the battle. Little did they realise that he and Ron had escaped out the back at the first sign of trouble. Again, Lockhart is not dumb.

Hermione and her parents left the alley before the argument escalated. I hope she writes soon.

Holly

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1st September, 1992

Dear Harry,

Everyone is packed into the Flying Ford Anglia for the trip to King's Cross, except we keep stopping to allow a Weasley sibling to run back into the house for something they forgot. In the meantime, I'll catch you up.

Hermione was pissed, but after reading through Lockhart's collection, she is beginning to doubt his skills. Several inconsistencies are cropping up that she wants to research when we get to school. Her letters have been...cold. I only hope that I can talk with her alone on the train and sort this out.

Ginny has calmed down considerably. We had a nice talk last night, and she loaned me some of her summer wear as an alternative to the rough skirts I've made from Dudley's old corduroys. To my embarrassment they fit almost perfectly. I'm nearly two years older than her; I shouldn't fit in her dresses. Anyway, she was asking about this journal again, trying to find out if there's a way you could respond through it. Ginny's convinced it should be possible, as she has seen something similar, where both people's writing would appear on the same page, just in different lettering. Due to our aborted shopping trip, it will be a while before I can hunt down something like that to replace this. I may actually be banned from Flourish and Blott's at this point.

I wanted to mention one other thing that happened. As we were getting packed into the car, Molly (that's Mrs. Weasley- she asked me to call her Molly after the bookshop fight. I think I've been adopted) asked me to put Hedwig in her cage so that she could be packed in on top. I looked at the wicker cage and was about to call Hedwig when I was overcome by a panicky feeling. The next thing I knew, I was smashing the wicker cage into kindling. When I was done, I called Hedwig and told her to fly to Hogwarts and stay in the owlery until tomorrow, and I would spend my next free day flying with her. Molly was a bit shocked, but she nodded knowingly at me and gave me a smile before turning back to packing the car.

Holly

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Just past Noon, same day

Harry I don't know how often you read this thing or if you have any way to communicate with Dumbledore in case of emergency, but I have one.

Ron and I were the last to try to get onto Platform 9 3/4 but we couldn't get through. It seems Dobby has taken my lie about not returning to Hogwarts personally, so he locked the barrier before we could get through. Since Arthur and Molly are stuck on the other side, we returned with our luggage to the Ford, hoping that they'll realise we're missing and Apparate back to us. Please let whomever you can know that we'll get there as soon as\_\_\_\_\_.

Ron just started the car up and we're flying over London. Get help; I'll try and handle this.

Holly



## Chapter 6: Bad Reputation

2 PM

Dear Harry,

Now that I've calmed Ron down (and described how north is to the right of the setting sun, so he should head that way) I can take a few moments to update you while I think up a solution to this predicament.

I swear I can just imagine Dobby's high-pitched cackle as he gloats over his little victory here. It was startling to find myself crashed into the barrier amidst mine and Ron's luggage, but more so when Dobby appeared directly above me pointing down at my face.

"Holly Evans lied to Dobby! Holly Evans is not like the Great Harry Potter! Youse and your Wheezy can just stay in Londondum until the old Wheezy's remember you!"

The moment the car started to rise into the air, I was fairly sure Dobby was still keeping an eye on us, as Ron wasn't listening to a thing I said until we were fully airborne and I started fumbling with controls. Ron got pissy until I reminded him that flying cars weren't standard issue in London no matter what Ian Fleming has published. During his confusion I found the cloaking device button, so we were just a loud moving echo of a Ford Anglia by the time we cleared the rooftops.

Arthur Weasley is either disrupting my nice=dumb theory or he's not as nice as he seems. This car is well thought-out for a hobby vehicle. I just figured out that the engine sound is actually a charm to help the vehicle blend in- when I turned on 'silent mode' the draw from the petrol gauge actually slowed perceptibly. I also found we can conserve petrol by changing the cloaking field to only cover the bottom half of the auto. We're still going to need to land before we reach Scotland, not just for fuel but to get some maps and perhaps a compass. At this point, I'm stuck on finding the school itself as it is Unplottable.

Holly

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4:30

Dear Harry,

Tea time has been revelatory. First, I have to say that Ron has the flying instincts of an ostrich. Once I convinced him we needed to land, he made his best attempt to catch supper for us by heading into a flock of sheep roaming across a hillside.

"Well, they looked like they'd make for a soft landing!"

I'm thinking of renaming him Moor-Ron for that one, but I realise he may yet be under elfin influence. Also it would be needlessly cruel- he is trying, after all.

We were able to escape the wrath of the rightly upset shepherd when we crashed through his wood fencing, forcing him to turn his motorbike around to recapture his spooked creatures. We found our way to the local petrol depot and I made my second discovery of the afternoon. The Ford doesn't take petrol. I had opened the cap to fill it up but instead of the fumes I expected to smell, my nose picked up traces of marjoram and bullion. Passersby made noises of disgust when I poked my finger into the fuel pipe opening and licked the slightly greasy residue I found. It's their own loss, really. Molly's stew is a taste not to be missed if you're given the opportunity to sample it.

Using some muggle funds that were included in the pouch Hagrid gave me in Diagon Alley, we bought out the depot's supply of canned soup and grabbed some snacks for ourselves as well. I also found a road map and even some maps from the local flying club showing patterns to avoid near Prestwick airport. If what I'm reading is right, there's a hole over a loch East of Glencoe that may actually... Oh, Hello Hedwig.

Well, I think I'll be able to guide us to school following Hedwig; if I could do magic right now I'd knock out Ron, but he's sufficiently distracted with the 10 pound collection of hard candy I purchased for

him. The driver's seat automatically adjusted for my height when I pushed the 'New Player' button mounted below the steering column. I would have had Ron budge over and let me drive if I'd known about that earlier.

Holly

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2nd September, 1992

Dear Harry,

Ron is a bit upset with me right now. He's had a hard day, what with his father giving him what for when Arthur came to retrieve the Ford, the Howler from his Mum that humiliated him in front of the whole school at morning mail, but what he's most upset with is his detentions with Filch for the next month. He almost left me alone about it when he thought I was serving detention with Professor Snape. I should have left him to his ignorance, but Hermione piped up too soon.

"Holly didn't say she had to meet with Professor Snape for detention, She said it was for détente."

Thank you Hermione. At least she explained this when the three of us were alone walking out to Herbology. I don't need Gryffindors in general to know I get along (in a way) with their nemesis the Oily Bat.

"So what's the difference?"

"Honestly, Ronald! Détente is a negotiated peace..."

"More like a ceasefire," I piped in.

"...based upon the idea that both parties are better served by their cooperation than continuing hostilities."

"So, if Snape doesn't harass you like he does the rest of us, what does he get out of it?"

"Did get, and I traded one school year of his indifference for troll parts and a promise 'not to provoke him with stupidity'. As he left me alone all last year, I guess I was a bit better than the 'collection of dunderheads he usually encounters'. Normally, the potion ingredients rendered from a fresh-killed Mountain Troll have a decent street-value."

"But why didn't you want the money?"

"My peace of mind was worth more. Also, I like potions- I might even be able to practice while at the Dursleys, which could save my life one of these days. After seeing Professor Snape crush Neville's ego into pulp for the first two months of classes last year, I was souring on the subject. By the end of the school year, I was almost as good as Hermione."

Hermione smiled at me for the compliment. I smiled back.

Ron interrupted our unspoken conversation. "So why try and change the deal?"

"Ronald, don't you listen? Holly said that their agreement expired."

"Which the good professor reminded me, night before last, after he was done threatening to expel us."

"Could you include me this time?"

I stopped in irritation at that suggestion.

"Ron, I don't know how I'm going to earn his mere indifference when you've ably bollixed up any good feelings he and I had established through last year by stealing the car with me in it. Not to mention that I have nothing to offer him right now!"

Ron grumbled away. Hermione looked at Ron's back darkly. I think she also noticed he was asking only for his benefit, and not hers as well.

"I'll do what I can for us, Hermione. Just don't expect much."

Hermione smiled at me again. We worked together as Herbology partners for the day. Ron was knocked unconscious by the wail of the pre-adolescent Mandrakes we were working on. It's not my fault he thought I was whispering at him. He should know to leave his earmuffs in place. Even Professor Sprout said so.

I hope I can work this out with Professor Snape. Lockhart is already proving to be a waste of time, and History of Magic is best used for doing other homework. I can't stand useless classes, especially when I have so much I need to learn.

Holly

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23rd September, 1992

Dear Harry,

Yesterday was my birthday, and I received a few things of interest so I figured I'd gloat.

Hagrid gave me a book of wizarding photos showing Mum and James Potter, along with friends of theirs from around the time of their graduation and wedding. I can't describe how much it means to see them all, almost alive in the pictures. I'm running behind on my homework for all the time I keep flipping through the pages. I will definitely bring this if ever we can meet.

As you know, I received a book on healing salves from you. I know you know I can heal quickly, but it doesn't mean the wounds don't hurt, not to mention the itching as my skin knits together. Thanks ever so much. I particularly appreciate that the recipes highlight which rare ingredients can be kept preserved. I may be doing some home-brewing this next summer, should things go as I expect.

Hermione got me the other really interesting thing. Before the altercation at Flourish and Blott's she had noticed some reporters

using a free-floating quill that was transcribing the press conference and adding descriptions as they wrote. She bought one for me- it's called a Quick-quotes Quill. You just place it on the page and tap a jewel at the base and it starts writing. According to the instructions, the more you use it as your own quill, the more it will write in your own style. They're not permitted in class, but I have an idea that I floated past Hermione this morning, and it seems to work. If you place the quill and set the jewel, then hit it with a Constipation hex, it just quivers there, accumulating words to transcribe until you lift the hex and it starts scrolling out what it has stored. I need to carefully test the limits of this as I don't want to ruin Hermione's gift. By the way, the more that the QQQ stores the more it quivers, which may be good or bad depending on where one keeps it hidden.

For Hermione's birthday, I gave her Perenelle's notebook to figure out. I hadn't had much time for shopping the way summer played out, but the look on Hermione's face when I explained whose it was and what it might contain leads me to think she liked it, and may have finally forgiven me for slapping her at the bookstore.

I didn't have the QQQ when I went to negotiate with Professor Snape, so I'll try to do the conversation justice here:

It actually was a detention, the only one I received for my participation in the great Anglia migration. I just had my own plans for how to use the time.

"Take off those ridiculous goggles, Evans. Why are you wearing them anyway?"

I pushed the goggles back up onto my forehead. "My normal glasses were destroyed at the end of last term. I didn't get a chance to buy new ones in Diagon Alley as our visit was cut short."

"Ah, yes, the brawl in the bookstore. No doubt you sided with the Weasleys in that barbaric display."

"Not entirely sir. I only hit Draco Malfoy in the nose because he said I was the daughter of a mudblood whore."

Snape stared at me, squinting and sneering, then swirled around and led me back to the potions storeroom.

"You will be scouring these cauldrons...by hand. No magic for you."

"Alright."

"What, no grumbling? No bemoaning the injustice of it all? I've been lenient with you up until now, Evans."

I kneeled down on the floor to start on the cauldrons before I responded with a bit of sexy in my voice. "Would it make it better for you if I whimpered?"

"10 points from Gryffindor for your cheek, Evans!"

"Sir?"

"What is it now Evans?"

I switched to McGonagall mode. "Is that 10 points a standard cheekiness punishment, or does it represent some rating, relative to how offensive I'm being? I only ask so I can judge just how much damage to our house totals I can do with any particular smart remark."

"Are you trying to get expelled?"

Truth time.

"No, sir. I am trying to break through whatever assumptions you have about my Gryffindor tendencies, so that we can negotiate a continued peace between us. Potions is a very important class to me. For very real and life-preserving reasons, I must be good at this subject. Your antagonism is, quite simply, souring my dedication and enjoyment in the discipline. I don't mind that you don't want to hand us the answers- I like to pursue my own resources and I'll discover the nuances of potion-making by my own hand. But your continuous merciless evisceration of anyone not already proving themselves with

a NEWT-level competence or family ties to Slytherin is just vindictive and petty, and it's destroying the future for this Art."

Professor Snape stared at me, looking almost baffled, for nearly 3 minutes. His next words he almost whispered.

"How very Slytherin of you."

"I'll take that as a complement, sir."

"As it was intended. Continue with that attitude, and you might make something of yourself here. Slack off or waste my time, and we'll see what I can do to catch you up on the accumulated grief your fellow Gryffindors have earned."

"Yes, sir."

I worked for about an hour before he broke the silence again.

"Evans, tell me something."

"Yes, sir."

"Why did you allow Weasley to take credit for your defeat of Professor Quirrel last year? Such an...accomplishment would no doubt make you popular amongst your fellow Gryffindors."

I thought about it before responding. "I don't want fame. It makes people act falsely towards you. I don't want people to ask me about the details. I killed a man. It was self-defense but I don't want to discuss it like I'm some hero. Let my brother be the hero. Let Ron feel like a hero- he could use the boost after the way his brothers treat him. His own mistakes will bring him back to earth soon enough."

"No doubt. Please continue to discourage any fame you may accidentally accrue. It would...sour my ability to tolerate you."

I took this moment to push things a little, but it didn't play out like I expected.



"Sir, Hermione shares many of my attitudes about potions, if you could..."

"No! Miss Granger does not learn merely to understand. She uses her gifts to set herself above others. She asks for approval to support her sense of superiority over her fellow students. So long as she is given these accolades, Miss Granger will always go only so far as the approval of her masters leads her."

"I think you aren't seeing her brilliance, sir."

"Wrong! I see it all too well. Miss Granger could be great, she could change history, but only if we guide her to reach as far as her own desires can take her. She will never gain my approval, and that shall spur her to achieve."

Wow. If I didn't know better, I'd say he was in love.

"Begging your pardon, sir, but you seem to have given this some thought?"

"Miss Granger reminds me of another bright light, which was extinguished far too early. Protect her, Miss Evans, from her own limitations. And do not speak of this conversation to her, ever."

"I swear."

And so should you. Consider yourself bound by a secrecy oath on this one, my brother.

Holly

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9th October, 1992

Dear Harry,

This should be a good test for the QQQ. It was quite the discussion in the common room. Besides, the darned thing is twitching about like it's being Crucio'd.

Transcription: 9th October, 1992 starting 2:18 PM GMT

Hermione Granger (HG): ...so that's why your goggles are still protected by the Impervious Charm. It's linked to a rune I scribed right here. How's your quill holding up?

Holly Evans (HE): Well, let's try it out.

Angelina Johnson (AJ): Oh, tell us, brave Roland, tell us of your feats of derring-do

Ronald Weasley (RW): But my name's Ronald...

Alicia Spinnet (AS): We know, you git. The question was how is it you killed Professor Quirrel? You can't cast a Slug-Expelling curse without having it reflected back at you! How could you defeat a fully trained adult? Even the stuttering Professor Quirrel was hired by Dumbledore for Defense, so he must have known what he was on about.

RW: I...uhhh...it's a state secret. I'm not supposed to tell.

AS, AJ, Katie Bell (KB): Ahhh, bollocks!

KB: You're pathetic Weasley. You just can't admit that you had nothing to do with it.

AS: Who killed the Professor?

AJ: Why are you stuttering?

AS: Answer the question!

AJ: Who are you covering for?

RW: Um, well Holly...

HE: It was Harry Potter. That's why Ron couldn't talk about it. Harry was here, which people aren't supposed to know. My brother killed Professor Quirrel.

[pause]

AJ: Why don't you keep out of this, freak? We don't want to have to look at you.

AS: Yes, Evans, where did you get that pathetic dress? Steal it from an orphan's doll?

Ginny Weasley (GW): I gave it to her to help cover up her scars.

HG: Ginny!

GW: They cover her back and upper arms. The only blouse she had was threadbare. I gave her my dress.

Transcription ended

Well, that's enough of that. I was trying to stop the write-back before we got to that part. Don't worry about it.

Fucking quill.

Ginny's a bitch.

Holly

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## Chapter 7: People Go Bonkers

1st November, 1992

Dear Harry,

This Halloween has been a bit of a fun fair ride. Not as traumatic as compared to killing a troll last year, but eventful. So far, the only thing harmed was a cat that I don't particularly like. I'm sure that this is just the start, though.

The evening started well enough. I was invited to attend a ghost celebration, which fit the mood of the day quite well. Sir Nicholas de Mimsy-Porpington, the Gryffindor house ghost was celebrating the 500th anniversary of his death. The meal was laid out on a long buffet table, but all the food was spoiled, so that the ghosts might catch a scent of what food used to smell like. Essentially, it was the rotting carcass of a feast. Hermione and Ron initially tagged along as they didn't want to insult Sir Nicholas when he invited us, but they left quickly to avoid the stench and the disturbing sights of so many ghosts. A ghost will appear as their body did at the moment of death, and ghosts are usually the result of a violent end, so a gaggle of ghosts is not unlike a floating hospital entry, with various detached or mangled body parts being compared like tattoos at a motorbike rally. Sir Nicholas himself is oftentimes referred to as Nearly Headless Nick, as he died at the hands of an amateur (or poorly bribed) headsman that never quite made it through Sir Nicholas' neck with his axe. It's a sore point for the honoree, as the Headless Hunt won't allow him to join in their reindeer games, and yet came by to insist on teasing him about it. Even the dead have their arseholes.

I find Sir Nicholas' company truly enjoyable. Speaking with him and the other ghosts always reminds me that there is more, after we are done with this world. I am in no rush to see what's next, but knowing there's more makes walking this life...acceptable somehow. I don't mind the body parts either. I find them fascinating, much as I was fascinated by the spiders in my first bedroom. I would watch them spin their webs, catch and eat their prey, make egg sacs to house their young. When the eggs hatched, the mother spider would be eaten, if she had remained. It is a horrifying and remorseless world,

the closer you look at it. I just want to understand how it all fits together. Perhaps I'll be a healer. As Hermione said, I don't flinch.

I was walking back from the party when I discovered a few unexpected things in the second floor hallway.

One: the floor was flooded over from the nearby girl's loo.

Two: Filch's cat, Mrs. Norris, looked to be replaced by a taxidermist's first work, and was hanging like a pub board from a wall sconce

Three: Graffiti has made its way into the magical world.

As is my luck, I was reading the propaganda on the wall when Filch came looking for the source of the water. Of course, my reputation as a blood fiend and ne'er-do-well led everyone that came running to hear his screeching accusations to believe that I was the cause of this scene. My only saving grace was that Sir Nicholas came forward to act as my sworn alibi. He's a good ghost, and I'm not sure if he could lie if he wanted to. Thankfully that worked in my favor as Prof McG and Professor Snape took him at his word. The headmaster confirmed their take on matters and that the cat had been petrified and might be cured eventually, using the mandrakes we're caring for in Herbology once they come to maturity. Having the three most senior opinion-makers at Hogwarts proclaim my innocence helped discourage Filch's ire, but the rest of the school is treating me like a criminal. Some are convinced that I was responsible for the horror show, while others are more concerned with where I was before I found the scene. They don't understand why I would want to spend time with ghosts.

Magically-raised people probably wouldn't understand how much the question of whether there is a soul has plagued the rest of humanity. Literally millions of people have died because they couldn't agree about what happens when you die. Almost as if we can't move forward as a species until we can resolve this issue, so we keep rushing into it in hopes someone will make it back to tell the rest of us it's OK. I think I'll ask Hermione what she thinks about this.

All this musing aside, the graffiti is a sign of trouble. Someone wants to scare people, and has succeeded so far. The message said "The Chamber of Secrets is open. Enemies of the Heir beware!"

No wonder I can't find Hermione- she went right to the library.

Holly

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4th November, 1992

Dear Harry,

Well, Hermione's digging revealed a few smatterings of information, and more was filled in when she prompted our History teacher Professor Binns to snap out of his ghostly repetitions and respond to questions. I have my own thoughts on what's happening, though.

The Chamber of Secrets is some sort of hidden room within the castle that was put in place by the founder of Slytherin House, Salazar Slytherin. Salazar...

Hang on.

If you go back and look at the entry where I had gotten my glasses, I mentioned that when I asked Prof McG and the headmaster where the money for my initial supplies came from "they mumbled something about a Saladbar Foundation for indigent muggleborns". This must have been quite the joke to them. Salazar (or perhaps Saladbar) Slytherin was historically known to hate muggleborns and didn't want them at the castle at all. I have to wonder if our headmaster and deputy headmaster were having me on, or if some other spiteful alumnus decided to actually create a foundation in the name of the one person who would never approve of its existence. It would be like if I created the Severus Trust for tutoring dim-witted potions students. Actually, that's an idea.

Back to history, or at least the popular version of it.

The general consensus is that Slytherin's heir is present in the castle, opening secret rooms no headmaster has yet found, releasing some horrible creature no one has seen, torturing mean cats and scrawling vague threats in unremovable blood.

It was Halloween. No one was harmed. Doesn't this just seem like a Weasley prank? (I forgot, I haven't explained any of their mischief yet other than Ginny's ill-chosen birthday gag. Trust me; this shoe fits, unlike her jumper.) So, as you might expect a mob of nice (thus dumb) people to act, these lemmings believe it must be my fault. Further evidence of the Weasley link can be seen in Fred and George's insistence that I be announced on the way to the Great Hall as 'the horrible petrifier of cats, drinker of troll blood, the bane of clean walls and dry floors everywhere'. I might be more irritated at them for this, but we do have a Quidditch match on the 7th, so this is working the nerves of the opposing Slytherin team just a bit more than turning them red and gold might. If it is a prank, I would be the last to call them on it. The chasers hate me enough as it is.

Holly

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Transcription: 8th November, 1992 starting 1:46 AM GMT

Holly Evans (HE): Dear Harry; as I am stuck experiencing the joy of Skele-Gro rethreading calcium through my forearm like fiery acid, I am having the Quick-quotes Quill take dictation for me. I used Silencio on the curtains around my hospital bed to keep Healer Pomfrey from being bothered.

HE sips from glass of water.

HE: Stupidity is rampant, and I am no stranger to the spreading infection of it.

HE grunts in pain.

HE: At first, this was working to our advantage. Hermione had become frustrated with the severely limited information about the

Chamber of Secrets, so she flattered Lockhart out of a pass to the restricted section of the library. While she didn't discover any new information about the chamber, her spelunking (which is Hermione's new favorite word) returned two resources of note: Moste Potente Potions, which I am itching to peruse and some runes reference that may help Hermione solve the cover of Perenelle's notebook. Hermione seems to be immune so far to the expanding circle of stupidity.

[pause]

I however, am not. My own dimness was played out during our Quidditch match. I found myself pursued by a very persistent and single-minded bludger that I just discovered was being controlled by Dobby. I then had three immediate stupid moments in a row: I let my desire to win the match override my wariness of Dobby's lethal missile, causing my arm to be broken; I let Lockhart close enough to use his wand; and I haven't killed him yet for making all the bones in my arm disappear.

HE sighs.

HE: A short bit ago, Dobby came to visit and confess his involvement in the bludger attack. I convinced him that if he didn't stop trying to save me soon, I would likely be dead by his efforts. Dobby did reveal that the Chamber exists, is now open and has been opened before. That's the other part of my stupidity. If I hadn't put Dobby out of my mind, I might have remembered his warning and not ascribed the attack to Fred and George. I might have even found him before he could put me in hospital. Hermione said I wasn't taking him or this situation seriously enough.

HE grunts in pain as she shifts position in bed.

HE: Why is he so easy to forget? There must be something about house-elves that makes a human mind throw away anything concerning the elf itself. Is this part of their enslavement? Were they captured, or is this a racial punishment for some long-forgotten crime?



[pause]

At least we won the match. I also plowed Draco Malfoy into the stands, the keeper posts and eventually the ground in my playing keep-away with Dobby's pet bludger. Poor Dobby.

[pause]

Hang on.

HE rereads transcription in her journal

HE: I just reread what I wrote and realised I had forgotten the little guy all over again. This elf-related memory leak is insidious!

HE pauses speaking to watch Headmaster Dumbledore and Professor McGonagall bring in a frozen boy holding a camera. [dialogue is out of Quill range due to Silencio effect]

HE: Ah right, stupidity. Well, our latest victim is being wheeled in by the head-master and -mistress. Creepy Colin Creevey, the paparazzi firstie who has been taking Ron's picture incessantly since beginning of term, has fallen victim to the petrifying effect. That puts us back onto the road to Hell. Hermione was right, this is serious. As soon as Healer Pomfrey releases me, Hermione and I have work to do. Nox.

Transcription ends

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12th November, 1992

Dear Harry,

Time will tell whether I am recovered from my bout of stupidity, but my arm is fully healed. I am beginning to think that it isn't deadly waves of stupidity affecting everyone, so much as a collective trip to bonkersville. Everything that has happened is making people act out of character. The Slytherins are almost amiable, because they think the Heir of Slytherin is here to make their lives easier. The

Hufflepuffs are reacting with unbelievable bouts of paranoia, the Ravenclaws are subject to unexpected outbreaks of hysteria, and the Gryffindors seem...timid. Despite our victory in our last match, Gryffindor pride and boastfulness is at an all time low. Professor Snape has been seen to almost smile at times, with how quiet his classroom has gotten.

Hermione is going a bit bonkers as well, but in a way I actually like.

Transcription: 11th November, 1992 starting 5:46 AM GMT

Hermione Granger (HG): Holly, you have to see this!

Holly Evans is returning to the dorm room from a shower, rubbing her hair dry with a towel.

Holly Evans (HE): (whispering) Hush, girl. You'll wake Par and Lav, and I've already seen enough of Hogwart's, A History. I'm going to wait for the film.

HG: (whispering) But you have to see this!

HE: Hop onto my bed and I'll seal the curtains

HG enters the canopy-covered bed and tucks her legs beneath her, holding open a copy of Hogwart's, A History with activated Quill resting as a bookmark.

HE draws her wand from her dressing gown, hops onto the same bed and closes the curtains.

HE: Silencio. Did you want to record this conversation?

HG: Whatever. You can add it to your journal or not. Just read this!

HE pulls the book to her lap and reads through the page marked by Quill.

HE: From what I gather, you think that the Slytherin library might hold more answers for us.

HG: Absolutely! If you consider how smug the Slytherins have been of late, it seems obvious they know more than they are telling. I've looked through our Gryffindor library in the common room, and it mostly consists of stories of courage and bravery, with a decent sampling of history covering prominent Gryffindor families of the past centuries. I asked Percy Weasley about the top shelf books I saw when we first started last year. Percy said that I wasn't allowed to access them until 6th year without a prefect's permission, as they covered advanced lessons specific to enhancing courage, teaching, and leadership. He hinted there may be some helpful advanced Transfiguration texts as well.

HE: Hermione, have you even slept yet?

HG: No, this is too important. Anyhow, it stands to reason that if the Gryffindor library holds works appropriate to our values and background, the Slytherin library might also.

HE: I think I remember Parvati's sister Padma saying she had to turn in her pop quiz from Lockhart to the Ravenclaw records. It would make sense that they would retain every test or quiz ever given, to aid their studies.

HG: Hmmmmm....

[pause]

HE: The Slytherins, Hermione?

HG: Oh, right! Well, the reason I pulled Moste Potente Potions from the library is that it contains the formula for a special draught that can make someone appear as someone else. It's called Polyjuice potion.

HE: I'm not following you.

HG huffs impatiently.

HG: Well, if we were to get into the Slytherin common room using your cloak, we couldn't actually look through the books, could we?

They would know something was wrong as floating books appeared and disappeared.

HE: Hang on. You deceived a professor to heist an advanced book of restricted potions so we can break into the Slytherin dorms to gain access to their restricted library. A plan you have been working on since before Creepy Creevey was petrified.

HG: Well, when you put it like that...

HE: Oh, I'm not opposed, I just can't figure why Hogwart's, A History was necessary.

HG: Well, I needed proof there was a library. I wouldn't want you to risk all this just because I believe there's a library.

HE smiles widely.

HE: Don't take this the wrong way, Hermione, but I would trust your reasoning out of the library's existence long before I took the written mention of it as gospel.

HG looks down at the book in HE's lap, then looks up at HE and smiles.

Transcription ends

I promise I did nothing to her. This excursion towards the dark side is of Hermione's own devising. I did convince her that while the Polyjuice potion would be essential for using the Slytherin resources, we still needed to get into the room. As my part of this mission, I have been working on some things to help with that. First, I have gotten quite skillful with Silencio since I first found it. What's more, I've discovered that my invisibility cloak 'likes' being silenced- the effect seems to last much longer when cast upon it compared to applying Silencio to my bed curtains. Also, I am working with Hermione on adding some features to my goggles. I want to shade my eyes from sudden flashes, but also see better in the dark. Using Lumos to write late at night when I was stuck in hospital brought that desire to mind. Healer Pomfrey didn't appreciate my diligence, insisting that when the

sun set I should be sleeping. If that were the case, I should think Hogwarts needs to be relocated more southerly, or should hold summer sessions. Night falls early in Scotland, especially as winter approaches.

Ah, bollocks! My stupidity hasn't left me yet. I was trying to learn the shrinking charm, so I can keep my broom readily at hand in case I need to make a quick escape.

Important safety tip #1: Always test new spells on something you don't mind losing. I foolishly chose my trunk, and used plenty of power to make sure it would shrink small.

Important safety tip #2: Never drink around your books. Drops of tea can make Reducio look like Reducto with very little effort.

My trunk is now a pile of splinters. At least the contents were unaffected. I could just cry.

Reducio. RED-OOO-SEE-OWE. Countered by Engorgio, the chaser's favorite charm.

Reducto. REE-DUCK-TOW. Countered by a shield charm or a trip to Hogsmeade I can't make or afford.

Holly

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20th November, 1992

Dear Harry,

Hermione cracked the cover of Perenelle's notebook this evening. I am going to copy over the most interesting parts we've discovered so far. The reason I say 'discovered', is that the puzzle can be solved in several ways, each one more complex than the last. We've...well, Hermione has opened two sections so far. The first is historical background on the Statutes of Secrecy. The second section is a

primer on the Memory Charm that Perenelle developed back in the 1600's.

Well that didn't work. I guess it's protected from copying. Not a bad thing, all around.

I'll summarise, then.

The Statutes of Secrecy were established in 1652, because it took that long to work out the wording. Magical culture had been operating under a tacit agreement since the 1400's that with the advent of the printing press, the sharing of information by muggles was going to make keeping magic a secret much more difficult. Magical culture had been keeping a low profile ever since the fall of Rome, when books and learning became synonymous with trouble. It was only with Perenelle's development of the Memory Charm that they could finally get together and resolve what they would allow non-magical folks to see. Centuries of maneuvering into positions as viziers and chancellors in order to control the possibility of organised persecution were wearing on them. The Ministry's existence started as an organisation purely designed to train, deploy and coordinate the efforts of these super spies to do the job of protecting wizardkind from muggle discovery. The politics came about as several powerful clans of magical descent argued about how much separation there should be, and what sort of corrections were allowed to be made. I think money was a factor as well.

Nobody sings Perenelle's praises for saving magical culture from annihilation. I get the sense that her already extended life was reducing how impressed everyone should have been by her accomplishments. She was already 250 years old and didn't look a day over forty. It also might have something to do with being a woman. The professionals in place took her inventions as the boon that they were, but men have ruled things for a while now, and the Clan Patriarchs weren't going to give her the credit. They wouldn't accept Nicholas as the source either. He was known for his insight but his memory was almost embarrassing, much like Albert Einstein. I have a feeling Nicholas was Perenelle's favorite test subject. Maybe that's why there was only one Philosopher's Stone.

## About Oblivate:

The Memory Charm is known as such because it doesn't remove memories, so much as mask them from being seen. It isn't a hex as no actual damage is done (when performed properly). The natural tendency for most memories to fade when not refreshed causes the masked memory to go unnoticed until the charm is no longer needed. Particularly traumatic memories will last much longer in the psyche and their emotional effects can be felt, usually through nightmares and 'unusual pathologies', even if the Charm was applied with expertise and power.

Expert Obliviators are trained to mask the memory with the suggestion of an alternative experience, so that the subject is less likely to suspect something is amiss. The Obliviator need not describe the memory in detail, just suggest what 'actually' happened and allow the victim's own mind to creatively fill the necessary gaps.

When applying the spell, one must aim at the head, preferably with surprise as the initial attack may be resisted with something called Occlumency. Hermione says the root word there is 'occlude' or to obscure, which is funny since that's what the Obliviator is trying to do in the first place. "Hide my memory? Well I'll just hide my whole mind! So there, bleagh!" Assuming the initial attack is successful, the target enters a suggestive state, ready to rework their own mind at the attacker's direction. The biggest problem for Obliviators in training is to restrict the amount of memory being modified, as the more extensive the memory, the harder it is for the victim to work out a solution. Perenelle's example was an Obliviator who tried to erase a blacksmith's memory of his wife's magic use. So much of his work experience was based upon their cooperative use of the forge and her wand work that he ended up the village idiot. The village took care of him for decades, hoping his 'talent' for smithing would return to him. They should have just killed him and made it look like an accident. It might have been more merciful.

Perenelle hints at a way to remove the Charm after it has applied. Hermione is fairly convinced we'll find it in a later section.

Holly

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12th December, 1992

Dear Harry,

Hermione is taking to this spy-crime thing really well, at least in intent. Her problem, I think, is that she relies too much on magic and doesn't always see the needs of a situation. I will explain.

Back before Hermione figured out how to open Perenelle's notebook, she had laid out her basic plan for plundering the Slytherin dorms' library. The morning after Hermione had explained her master plan, she started setting up her cauldron in the space between our beds. Around the point where she was explaining that the lacewings needed to simmer for three weeks I reminded her that we shared the dorm with two other girls, and they would at least ask what we were up to. When I returned to the dorm after dinner that night, she had moved the cauldron to the shower. I wouldn't have bothered looking except that simmering lacewings smell a bit like boiling lamb, which turns my stomach. Aunt Petunia could clear the house at the mere announcement that we were having a lamb roast that evening. It took me a while to track down Hermione's cauldron, as she had hid it behind some sort of illusory wall, making the shower room noticeably smaller and less rectangular.

Eventually I convinced her we should use Myrtle's room.

Moaning Myrtle is the ghost of a school girl that died at Hogwart's back in the 1930's. She spends her time thinking about death and harassing anyone who visits her lavatory, which is the same girl's loo on second floor that had flooded into the hallway on Halloween. That was her handiwork. Apparently when she has been neglected for a while, or gets worked up by unsympathetic visitors, she stops up the drains, opens all the taps and flushes the toilets. I guess she finds water comforting. Either that or she has a thing for Argus Filch, as he has to do the cleanup when she gets all fluidy. If she weren't a ghost I'd suspect her of petrifying his cat out of jealousy.



Hermione wasn't initially excited about this venue. Along with her discomfort around ghosts in general and Myrtle in particular, Hermione was concerned that this room was at the center of everything that seemed to be going wrong this year. I countered that this was its primary selling point; no one wants to come here. I was further assured of the perfection of this location when Ron firmly stated he wasn't going to be able to help us this time.

"It's a girl's loo."

"Brilliant, Ron. I promise we won't turn you over to the sisterhood for entering one of our holy places, as your intentions are good."

"What are you working on anyway?"

"The less you know, the happier you'll be."

"Well, yeah! Why don't you get Ginny to help you?"

"Not bloody likely."

I forgive Hagrid for being gullible, but Ginny confessed my secrets to a packed room, and she did it to hurt me on purpose. I haven't figured out why, but my distrust of her doesn't require proof or explanation.

Hermione and I worked on the potion for a few weeks before circumstances brought her one step further to the Dark Side. Or adulthood. There was growth.

Transcription: 6th December, 1992 starting 7:16 PM GMT

Hermione Granger (HG): We need bicorn horn and boomslang skin. I can't mail order for them- their inclusion in this recipe is what makes them a restricted item for purchase. We need to get some from the Potions stores.

Holly Evans (HE): You want to burgle Professor Snape?

HG: It's not a matter of want, we can't get the ingredients outside of Knockturn Alley, and even then they would be prohibitively expensive.

HE: So, we're going to steal from Professor Snape?"

HG: I have an idea how we can get the materials. At the double potions lab period this Thursday, you can toss this root into the swelling solution, causing it to explode. The solution should end up covering plenty of the students. In the resulting chaos, I'll slip into his lab and grab what we need.

HE: So, you're going to steal from...

HG: Why are you making such a big thing of this?

HE: Because you thought of it first. Ever since I slapped you, I swear you're thinking has improved, but your ethics have been shelved.

HG looks down, then back at HE.

HG: It was quite the wake-up call. Perhaps distrusting teachers comes naturally to you, but until I saw Lockhart for the fraud he is, I have always believed that teachers and leaders have our best interests in mind. Even Professor Snape, cruel as he is, has a point. Most of those he berates have treated his classroom or his subject disrespectfully, by not studying the materials and respecting lab discipline.

HE smiles widely

HE: Exactly.

HG gives HE a petulant look.

HG: Alright, your point is made. So...what do you think of my plan?

HE: That? Oh that's a horrible plan.

HG: What?!

HE: If we want to draw the attention of everyone in the classroom, probably the whole school and most particularly the Oily Bat, we can

do damage to his classroom in a premeditated manner. I wouldn't try to predict how an exploding potion will land amidst a classroom full of targets including ourselves. Even if you weren't the only student untouched by the effect, your guilty conscience might give you away before you even left the storeroom.

HG: I suppose you have a better idea?

HE: I'll get a detention. I can nick our ingredients while cleaning the shelves. It would be best if we include some replacement stuff transfigured from twigs and bark- most likely he won't discover the problem for months, and then he'll just think the sample went bad.

HG: How will you ensure you're given a detention?

HE: I think I'll pick a fight.

HG: Won't that ruin your carefully arranged ceasefire?

HE smiles.

HE: It's a sacrifice I am willing to make.

Transcription ends.

The next class, I had some of the best exercise I've gotten since coming to school.

I went in with an idea of who I would target and how I would get the fight started. Pansy Parkinson helped things along by being herself. Since the announcement that both she and Draco Malfoy would be staying at Hogwarts over holidays, Pansy has been spending every public moment wrapped around Draco's arm or laughing at his snide remarks. Draco is a bit overcome, it seems. He still presents himself in his perfectly-pressed, eternally starched aspect that leads me to believe that his personal magical power is focused into being ready for a Witch Weekly photo shoot. Despite that, Pansy seems to be making Draco uncomfortable enough to look disheveled. Pansy has noticed her advances aren't being entirely appreciated, so she's been pouring on the charm for the first hour of potions. It probably didn't

help her confidence that I kept looking at her with pity, casting an infrequent longing look at Draco anytime I thought she might catch me. Pansy was well primed when I walked up behind her as she retrieved the second set of components for this potion. My whisper that suggested Draco was dealing with her only because she was easy set her off.

Pansy spun around and launched herself at me, her sharpened fingernails clutching towards my face to attack my eyes. I fell backwards to allow both of us to fall to the floor. Pansy screeched and growled with frustration as she vainly attempted to pull off my goggles. One of Hermione's latest improvements to their design was an automatic sticking charm applied under the rims. It actually makes them more comfortable to wear, and one only needs to put their thumb under the right lens and think 'release' to get the sticking to unstick. Not that Pansy knew that.

After allowing the Slytherin a half-minute to attack me without reprisal, I decided it was time to move things along. Here's a quick tip for brawling- a forceful knee between your opponent's legs is effective on girls as well. In this case, it knocked Pansy forward to crack her head against a nearby desk. I used her momentary bafflement to switch positions. Once I had her beneath me, I wrapped my right leg around the outside of her left thigh, and then hooked my ankle over her right leg. At the same time I pinned her right arm under her body and pulled her left arm over her head, holding her wrist against the stone floor and twisting her torso so she couldn't get any leverage. Once properly pretzeled, I realised my right arm was free to operate and proceeded to hammer my fist into her face repeatedly. Don't worry- I didn't use any magic in my fist. I was just trying to provoke a punishment, not kill the girl. Around the eighth time my fist cracked against her cheek a spell shot from behind me forcefully separated us. I flew back to crash against the base of another work table. As I refocused my vision to my new location, I could see Professor Snape approaching quickly with his wand pointed at me. I sat up but didn't move to rise.

"I'd like to point out that she jumped me." I said calmly while lightly touching my split lip.

The furious man barely held in his ire as he barked out orders. "Mr. Malfoy, you and Miss Bulstrode take Miss Parkinson to see the Healer. Everyone else, OUT!" His next words dripped from his mouth like honey in a tone that made everyone who hadn't yet escaped the classroom shiver in dread. "Miss Evaaaaannnsss, you will stay right where you are."

As he turned away I slipped the hairs I pulled from Pansy's head into a pocket of my robes.

My efforts were fruitful as I was compelled to serve detention with Snape every night for the rest of term and to clear snow at Filch's whim through the holidays.

Hermione came down to the potions lab to pick me up after my second night's labor for Snape. She fussed over how raw my hands had gotten using the cleansing reagents Snape supplied for my beaker sanitising task.

"It's no big deal, Hermione. I have the perfect soak for this in the healing salves book Harry gave me. I even nicked the necessities from Snape's stores as I grabbed our bounty."

"Still, it looks simply awful and I can't imagine it feels any better."

"It's alright, really. Now don't fuss and come with me."

"What? Why? Where are we going?"

"Do you call that 'not fussing'? We're going to find the Slytherin dorms and listen in to what their password might be."

Hermione and I ducked into an empty alcove and after applying to the cloak her enhanced Silencio (it allows sound into the cloak while keeping our noises from escaping) we snuck quietly and invisibly back down the corridor and to where the Slytherins disappeared each night after dinner. After a while, we found some 4th years returning from the library and carefully followed them down into the dungeons. Once there, we were unexpectedly...outfoxed. It seems the Slytherins don't use a password. Each student would walk the length of a rather

grim painting of a fox hunt where the fox was played by desperate-looking boy wearing only a loincloth and a fox-head shaped helmet. The student would then turn and walk towards the opposite wall, place his hand against a particular square brick, and a hidden door would open. Even when they were travelling in pairs or trios, each student would place their hand on the space before entering the opening. Hermione and I retreated to our dorm to consider our options.

Transcription: 11th December, 1992 starting 10:04 PM GMT

Hermione Granger (HG): Well, that was depressing.

Holly Evans (HE): It is a setback, but I'm not sure we're completely undone. They have to have a way to let visitors in, and we don't know what actually happens if someone unrecognised is allowed to pass through the door.

HG: How do you propose we find out?

HE: Well, that's easy. I'll stake out the doorway at night. Eventually, a dim bulb like Crabbe will forget to follow their security protocol, and I can see what their defense entails. It can't be too horrible, as the Slytherins aren't prone to sudden injuries or hexes without the Weasleys taking part. I can also keep a watch for any visitor arrangements.

HG: Perhaps it isn't that sophisticated in its detection. The door may simply check the entrant visually, which means the Polyjuice...

HE: No, no, didn't you hear? Each person was recognised by name and year.

HG: What do you mean hear? I didn't hear anything.

HE: You didn't hear it? I quite plainly heard each person's name whispered back to them from the stone they touched.

HG: I heard a hissing, not unlike the doors on Star Trek, though more like the ones in the Original Series and less like in the Next...

HE: Never mind that, why would I hear something that you couldn't?

HG: This reminds me of when you were hearing things back on Halloween.

Transcription halted

I have a confession. I didn't mention why I was in the second floor hallway when I discovered the petrified cat. I had left Sir Nicholas' bash and was heading back to my dorm when I heard a sound like whispering, travelling down the hallway. I followed it for a while but had to backtrack and find some stairs as the voice moved upwards to the second floor. By the time I caught up to where the voice had been headed, I was staring at a cat-sicle. The voice had been whispering about wanting to kill and to feed, not necessarily in that order. When I mentioned it to Hermione, she rightly suggested that disembodied voices weren't meant to be discussed, even amongst the magical.

Isn't this pause feature cool?

Transcription resumed

HE: Well maybe I wasn't just hearing things. Maybe I was hearing a creature moving through the castle, one that speaks in the same tongue that the door uses.

HG: You're a Parseltongue!

HE: What did you call me?

HG: Have you ever seen a snake?

HE: Well, yeah, once. I went to the zoo with Dudley and Piers Polkiss...Oh! Oh! I spoke to a Brazilian Boa right about the time I trapped Dudders behind the glass!

[pause]

What's with the look?

HG: It's like I said after Halloween, only worse maybe. Magical people hearing voices may be bad, but speaking to snakes is very bad. Parseltongue is associated directly with the Dark Arts, and it was one of Salazar Slytherin's most notorious abilities.

HE: Of course! The Slytherin dorms are protected by a lock designed by the House's founder, operating in a way only he could crack.

HG: Aren't you at all concerned with this ability of yours?

HE: Hermione, it is what it is. Do you think I'm evil?

HG: Welllll...

HE: Seriously.

HG: No, of course not. I wouldn't elect you Minister, but I know your intentions are good. And I will be here to make sure you don't fall into the darkness.

HE: My hero.

HG: We could be wrong, you know. Maybe you are just bonkers.

HE hits HG in the face with her pillow.

Transcription ended

I'm going to sign off here, Harry. I need sleep. Something out there is trying to kill us, something snake-like that can petrify, and that's not even my primary concern. Whatever it is, someone is controlling it.

Sleep well.

Holly

A/N: "Deadly Waves of Stupidness" is a reference to an episode of the Nickelodeon cartoon *Invader Zim* called 'Plague of Babies'; no



infringement is intended. Zim shall rule, but he was invented by Jhonen Vasquez.

## Chapter 8: Holidays 1992 Intrusion 101 (M)

December 17th, 1992

Dear Harry,

I am camped out near the Slytherin entrance under cloak and Silencio, waiting for someone to enter without using the entrance stone. Each and every time a student walks up to the blank section of wall across from the fox/manhunt painting, they put their hand on the stone and I hear their name spoken in that hissing whisper. Credit to the Slytherins, they are consistent with their security.

Hold on, I think I'm in luck. Marcus Flint, that snaggle-toothed Neanderthal from their Quidditch squad, is coming up the hallway with a Ravenclaw girl shuffling along in front of him. I think it's one of their prefects, Penelope something. This will prove whether we can gatecrash or not. It's strange, she seems almost asleep. Flint's holding his wand out and telling her to move along. Her eyes are all glassy.

This is horrible. The next thing that happened was the door stone recognising Flint, then he pushed her forward through the opening. As the door closed, I could hear someone inside say "Now the party can get started." I'll let the Quill tell the rest. I was clutching it as I ran to find a teacher, a prefect, Hell; I would have taken Filch at that point. I must have activated the Quill when Percy grabbed my arm.

Transcription: 17th December, 1992 starting 11:01 PM GMT

Percy Weasley (PW): You shouldn't be out after curfew, Evans. Just who do you think you are?

PW grabs Holly Evans by the left upper arm and pulls her towards the stairs.

Holly Evans (HE): To Hell with the curfew, Percy! A girl is about to get raped!

PW: Don't start with me. I know all about your lies. You'll be held fully accountable for your crimes this time.

HE: Percy, you prat, let me explain! I just saw a girl dragged into the Slytherin common room!

PW: Right. What could you possibly be doing all the way down there? There's no reason for you to have been walking past their dorm. Detentions with Professor Snape never last past curfew. You're lying.

HE: AS GOD IS MY WITNESS I just saw Penelope Clearwater brought into their common room! She wasn't in her right mind! Marcus Flint had his wand on her!

PW stops dragging HE but continues to hold her arm.

PW: Penny?

HE: Yes! I don't care if you expel me; get some help and get in there!

PW releases HE, looks at her sternly.

PW: Head immediately back to our common room. Stay there in case you are needed for questioning. For her sake, do not tell anyone of what you have seen. No one! Do you understand?

HE: Yes! Just go, would you?

PW jogs away down the corridor.

HE notices the Quill in her hand is twitching. HE draws her journal from the inside pocket of her cloak.

Transcription ended

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December 18th, 1992

Dear Harry,

I am in a world of shit. I have no memory of any of what is written here about the night of December 17th. I remember being bored, waiting for someone to blow protocol in front of the door, then some vague thing about walking back to get some treacle tart from my trunk. As my trunk is in splinters, I know this isn't my memory. I don't know what to do now.

Holly

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December 19th, 1992

Transcription: 19th December, 1992 starting 5:28 AM GMT

Holly Evans (HE) remains curled up on her bed, eyes staring out the nearby window. Quill is curled in her hand. Hermione Granger (HG) approaches the bed and sits down at the edge, turned to face HE. HG places her hand on HE's forearm.

HG: You didn't go to classes yesterday.

[pause]

Professor McGonagall asked me to check up on you.

[pause]

Ron is threatening a hunger strike. He...

[pause]

I can't stand to see you like this.

HE swallows and blinks.

HG: You are the most incredible, incomprehensible person I have ever met. You are this little thing, yet you have faced a Mountain Troll and a possessed teacher and killed both of them, without a wand!

You negotiate with this school's most notorious instructor as an equal! You provoked a Slytherin into a muggle brawl for Heaven's sake! And if that's not enough proof of your extraordinary presence and greatness, you even outthink me on occasion.

HE: (whispering) What do you want from me Hermione?

HG: I want you to stand up, like you always do. I have never even heard of someone so absolutely undaunted by the challenges thrown their way as you are. I want to believe in you, like I have believed in you since you started to include me in your adventures. I want you to shrug and say 'whatever' and tell me how we're going to break into Dumbledore's office, or explain how we don't need to worry about Slytherins ruling our world because they're all going to die off in two generations from inbreeding. I want you to tell me what I forgot to consider when brewing illegal potions. I want you to handle the walking dead like they were untrained puppies. I want to know what happened and how we will handle it. I want you to make me feel like it will all be okay, because right now I don't think it will all be okay, because you're not okay.

HG starts crying.

HG: I want my friend back.

HE sighs.

HE: (quietly) Have you seen the Ravenclaw prefect Penelope Clearwater, lately?

HG: (sniffs) What?

HE: (slowly) Best as I can tell, here's what happened.

I was hidden outside the Slytherin dorms, waiting for someone to go in with a guest or forget to touch the entry stone. Along comes Marcus Flint, with Penelope ahead of him, shuffling along looking drugged or something.

Before I can do anything about it, they're entering the Slytherin common room where someone else is expecting them to show up.

I ran to find someone to tell and found Percy.

He took some convincing but sent me back to our dorms and headed off to seek further help.

I only know these things because I had the Quill transcribe them immediately after Percy ran off.

After that, someone found me, Obliviated me, left me a non-incriminating false memory about my trunk, and I woke up in here yesterday morning to discover all this.

Penelope was most likely raped by at least two boys. Percy has been Obliviated. Penny has most certainly been Obliviated if you've seen her at all.

HG: Oh, God. Oh, God! Holly, that's horrible!

HE: Whomever did this to me is operating somewhat legitimately, as Harry has no doubt read what I wrote and mentioned it to Dumbledore, assuming he has that sort of avenue of communication. Even without my journal, my understanding from Perenelle's notes suggest that Obliviate would send off a flag of some sort if it came from a caster uncertified in its use, much less the wand of an underage wizard.

HG: I do recall seeing Penelope at dinner last night. She looked in good spirits, but haunted. Like she's having nightmares.

HE: She is.

HG: Why her?

HE blinks, and then sits up in her bed.

HE: She's attractive and a muggleborn; she's a prefect, so Flint may have crossed her or vice versa at some point.

[pause]

How can any girl be safe?

HG: (tentatively) You should see Madame Pomfrey; to make sure nothing else is...wrong.

HE looks straight into HG's eyes.

HE: Hermione, I don't know if I can stand to find out. My legs have been knocked out from under me. If I have been...violated, as well, or worse yet impregnated? I promised myself I would not walk away from this life. I have seen and done too much to let it take away my chance at a better outcome. I don't want to break that promise, but I may reach that point where I say 'enough!'

HG: (Gasp!) You wouldn't kill yourself!

HE considers for a moment, her eyes flooding with tears.

HG embraces HE in a strong hug. Both girls cry for several minutes.

HE shakes her head finally and releases HG from the hug.

HE: Not for this. I will survive this. We can't let this be swept away either. I don't know how we can pinpoint who was involved in covering this up, but I think we can at least send a message to the perpetrators that the behavior will not be allowed to pass unanswered.

HG: Won't we get in serious trouble?

HE: Only me, Hermione. I want you away from this. I need you instead to concentrate on finishing that potion and cracking the next layer of Perenelle's protections. If there is a way to unmask an Obliviation, we need it.

HG: But what about...

HE: Hermione, if they come after me, they will be tipping their hand that they know what happened and that I have reason to act on it. If anything, I have to do this.

HG: Holly, um, I can check...if you want. That is...

HE: What are you trying to say, Hermione?

HG: Lavender showed me a spell from her family grimoire that can test a girl to see if she's still...unspoiled. I could try to cast it, if you'd like.

HE stares at HG

HE: Do it.

HG mumbles. A tendril of white ribbon-like energy alights on HE, centered on her pelvis. The glow swirls until it flashes pink.

HG: (smiling) You're fine! You haven't been...uh, besmirched.

HE: (slightly smirking) If I didn't know better, I'd say you were happy you got the opportunity to try out the spell.

HG looks mockingly guilty.

HE: Hermione...

HE reaches out to HG and envelops HG in a strong hug.

HE: ...Thank you.

Transcription ends

Holly

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Dear Harry,



Transcription: 20th December, 1992 starting 12:28 PM GMT

Katie Bell approaches Alicia Spinnet, Parvati Patil and Lavender Brown at the Gryffindor House table. Holly Evans is sitting alone two seats away, reading from the Standard Book of Spells, Year Five.

Katie Bell (KB): You will not guess what I just heard!

Alicia Spinnet (AS): This isn't about that Flinch-Fetch boy who got petrified along with Nearly Headless Nick is it? That was all yesterday.

Parvati Patil (PP): That was Justin Finch-Fletchley; he's in our year...

KB: Whatever, that's not what this is about! Marcus Flint was found naked suspended in ropes from the ceiling of the boy's loo on fourth floor! He was found just this morning! I heard it looked like a giant spider had caught him in its web!

PP: Oooh, I heard he was in trouble! Padma said she heard Professor Flitwick was actually angry and that Flint's being expelled for 'undisclosed reasons'.

Parvati Patil made quote marks with her hands just then.

Lavender Brown (LB): Well, what I got from Lisa Turpin...Lisa's in hospital for that awful glamour that changed her hair orange, so she's been talking to Esmeralda Smethwyk who is trying for a healer apprenticeship...

AS: Stay on topic!

LB: Right, well Lisa said that Esmeralda said that Flint's fingers were broken and his boy-parts shriveled into peppercorns! A message left written on his chest says... (giggle)

AS, KB, PP: What?!

LB: It says "I think Flint used his willy too much."

AS, KB, PP: (giggles)

LB: And it was signed...the Spider!

AS, KB, PP: Oooooooooohhh! (giggles)

Holly Evans (HE): I heard Flint's wand was stuck halfway up his rectum, and he didn't realise it until he clenched up and snapped the tip.

HE turns a page in her book with a snap.

AS, KB, LB, PP: Eeeewwwww!

Transcription ends

Ask me no questions and I'll tell you no lies.

Holly

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December 24th, 1992

Dear Harry,

With the bulk of the school away for holiday, Hermione and I are going to finish up the Polyjuice and give it a go. We worked out that Draco Malfoy, Pansy Parkinson and Millicent Bulstrode are also staying here over the break. We figure we can act as needed to get Malfoy to lead us into the Slytherin common room.

I'll start the transcription ahead of time in case something goes wrong. If you could be up around 1AM of Boxing Day to keep an eye on us, I'd appreciate it. Happy Christmas in the meantime!

Holly

Transcription: 26th December, 1992 starting 1:21 AM GMT

Hermione Granger (HG): You should never have taken the law into your own hands!

Holly Evans (HE): What law? Don't think that I didn't try to work this out within the rules. That's what got me Obliviated!

HG approaches cauldron with two cups and a ladle. HG waves ladle at HE

HG: You'll be caught and expelled. You'll probably be Obliviated again since you don't have any family to back you up.

HE is staring down at this journal lying on a table near a bubbling cauldron.

HE: Harry may never have met me, but he should know me well enough by now. He would back me up. Besides, the ones that did this to me have to already know I took care of Flint. Either me or Percy would fit the bill, as Penny is clearly unaware of her travails, and Percy doesn't have the balls.

HG: (giggles)

HE: Figuratively, I mean. Alright, I've started the Quick-quotes quill to writing, so if we screw up, it's all recorded. Hopefully someone will find our mangled bodies and read this page to see what we did to ourselves.

HG: Don't you have any faith in my skills?

HE: Absolute faith, it's the ingredients I can't fully trust. There's also a part of me that doubts Pansy Parkinson is actually human, so something horrible may result by my sampling essence of pug-face.

HG: (giggles) Well, I think I may be at greater risk then. Ron is convinced that Millicent is descended from trolls. Crabbe and Goyle as well.

HE steps back from the table with the journal and sits down next to the cauldron.

HE: Why are you all giggly?

HG shrugs and sits down in front of the cauldron.

HG: I don't know. This experimentation is really getting me excited! It's like, we're doing this because I want to know, not because someone told us we should know. In fact, they would probably say we shouldn't be doing this. It's exhilarating!

HE: Right!

HE straightens her shirt and speaks in an official tone.

HE: This is an extracurricular experiment in covert brewing of Polyjuice Potion by Gryffindor students Hermione Granger and Holly Evans. If only the clothes are recognisable after our testing, please note that Miss Granger is wearing a fetching white Oxford button-down shirt and standard school uniform knee-length skirt, while Miss Evans is sporting a khaki dress shirt and a home-sewn black corduroy skirt with thigh length socks striped in Gryffindor red and gold.

HG: They're cute! Where did you get those?

HE: Neville gave them to me for Christmas. Now focus!

HE moves her goggles down over her eyes from her forehead.

HE: I will be taking the first sample, using hair from Pansy Parkinson I acquired before end of term.

HG dollops potion into each cup and hands one to HE.

HG: Yes, that was quite the altercation. What did you say to her anyway?

HE drops hairs into her cup and stirs.

HE: "I see Malfoy chooses his bedmates like he chooses his brooms- he looks for something fast and maneuverable, yet slow to respond"

HG laughs.

HE: Bottom's up!

HE drinks contents of her cup. Facial features of HE shift into semblance of Pansy Parkinson, then HE's skin starts to tremble. HE's whole body spasms backwards. HE rolls over, pushes herself up to kneeling, and then expels the contents of her stomach onto the floor. HE's features have returned to normal, though she is flushed. HE removes her goggles.

HE: Ugh, I think I'm allergic to this goop.

HG flourishes her wand at the sick on the floor.

HG: Evanesco

HE: Thank you.

HG: Well, I suppose it's up to me then. Perhaps I can keep the door open wide when I enter and you could follow with the cloak.

HE returns to a sitting position next to the cauldron, and wipes off her face with a damp cloth.

HE: One step at a time, Hermione. This may just be a bad batch.

HG picks up the second cup.

HG: I will be taking the next sample, using hair plucked from Millicent Bulstrode's jumper during our last Charms class of term.

HG adds hair to the cup, stirs and drinks its contents.

HG lurches to standing, then runs to the nearest lavatory stall

HE: Are you all right?

HG is heard heaving into the toilet.

HE: This is kinda déjà vu. (louder) Did it work?

HG: Oh, no!

HE stands up and follows HG's path to the stall and leans against the door frame.

HE: What is it? Is she really part troll?

HG: Akghh! Just give me a minute!

HG is heard fumbling about in the stall.

HE: Hermione?

HG slams open the door to the stall. HE steps back. HG steps out to reveal HG has become a full sized cat-human hybrid with brownish black fur.

HG: I've made a terrible mistake. I must have gotten her cat's hair instead of Millicent's!

HE: Oh, God. Didn't you say that mixing animal...

HG: Mixing animal hairs into the potion can cause irreversible cross-species mutations, yes. Oh, GOD! I am such a fool!

HE: Well, it isn't a guarantee. I've seen Madame Pomfrey heal some really outrageous student mistakes. We should go to her as soon as we clean this away.

HG is beginning to cry

HG: Holly, I don't know if I can handle this!

HE starts to look around the room

HE: I know you'll get through this.

HG: HOLLY!

HE swings her face back to look HG in the eyes.

HE: What?!

HG: Just...can you hold me? Can you stand to ...to hold me in this state?

HE moves forward to embrace HG. HE hugs HG tightly.

HG cries.

HG and HE slowly lower to the floor. HE sits with legs extended forward and HG lays sprawled over HE's lap, legs curled up under her. HG's arms are still hugging HE around the waist. HG's tail is curled along her leg.

HG continues to cry

HE: We'll get through this, Hermione. It will get better.

HE starts to rub HG's back. HG's crying is reduced to a sniffle.

HG: Oooh, ow. Um...can you do that under the shirt? It's...It's rubbing my fur wrong through the fabric.

HE: Sure.

HE untucks HG's shirt from her skirt and begins to stroke the fur along HG's back.

HG uncurls her legs and stretches around HE, continuing to hug her waist. HG's tail begins to flick back and forth.

HG: (Purrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrr...)

HE: (giggles) I think she likes this!

HG: (...rrrrr.) It's very soothing. I'm actually beginning to feel a bit better. (Purrrrrrr...)

HE: If you're feeling better, maybe we should take you to see Madame Pomfrey? We can use the cloak...

HG: (...rrr.) No! No. I'd just like to stay here like this for a little while. Could we please?

HE resumes stroking HG's back

HG: (Purrrrrrrrrr...) Mmm, lower, please (...rrrrrrrrrr...)

HE continues stroking the fur along HG's spine, down to the small of her back

HG: (...rrrrrRRRRRRrrrrrrrrrrrrRRRRRRrrrrrrrrrrRRRRR) Gasp!

HE: Are you alright?

HG: There's a spot that's a bit lower that you're almost getting to. It's like an itch I can't scratch...

HE: Right at the base of your, um, tail?

HG: Yeah, that's it.

HE reaches down, lifting up HG's skirt to expose her fur-covered backside and 2 foot long furry tail.

HE: Going commando, are we?

HG: Don't be rude! My knickers started to pinch horribly as the tail grew in, so I doffed them and put them...um...somewhere. I stuck them in my halter, alright?

HE: Calm down, I didn't mean anything by it.



HE resumes stroking HG's lower spine, playing her fingers around HG's tail as it twitches and sways

HG: (Purrrrr...) Whatever. (...rrrrrrrrrrrrRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRR)

HE: I'm not surprised you're liking this. I read the Kama Sutra that Aunt Petunia sent me. There are all sorts of references in Ayurvedic medicine about chakras, centers of energy within the body. The base of the spine here is the Muladhara chakra, a center for longing and the base of spiritual awakening...

HG: (...RRRRRRRRRRRR) Gasp! (RRRRRR) Gasp! (RRRRRR)  
Gasp! (RRRRRR) Gasp!

HE: Hermione?

HG crawls forward across HE's lap until her forepaws are clutching at the stone tile floor.

HG: (RRRRRR) Gasp! (RRRRRR) Gasp! (RRRRRR) Gasp!

HE shifts her stroking to include part of HG's tail

HG: Oh, God! (RRRRRR) Gasp!

HE: What?

HG: Oh, God! Holly, touch me!

HE: Are you serious?

HG: Touch me please! (RRRRRR) Gasp! (RRRRRR) Gasp!

HE moves her hand around from massaging the base of HG's tail to gently cover HG's clitoris with her fingers, and continues stroking the base of the tail with her other hand.

HG: OhHHhHHhhh GOD! (RRRRRR) Gasp! (RRRRRR) Gasp!  
(RRRRRR) Gasp!

HE moves her hand slowly in a circular motion over HG's damp quivering vulva.

HG: Ahhh GOD! Ahhh GOD! Sweet Baby Maeve, just don't stop! Ahhh GOD!

HE: Y'know, if you wanted stimulation the Quill...OHMIGOD THE QUILL!

Transcription ended

You are, of course, sworn to secrecy once again. Your life will be forfeit. Keep it in mind.

Holly

(and how the Hell did the Quill know her vulva was damp and quivering?)

A/N: Acknowledgements are due to other authors for some of this fun:

canoncansodoff for inspiring the Ayurvedic stuff, found in 'Alternative Medicine'

Draco664 on fanficauthors for Hermione getting sexually excited when Harry uses his brain, from 'Journeyman Potter'

cloneserpents for 'A Tale of One Kitty...' and the "Sweet Baby Maeve..." quote from 'HP and the Sword of Gryffindor', which I still believe should be called 'the Sordid Gryffindor'

Author's Note: For those who may have skipped the last chapter to avoid the M-rated material, a quick summary:

Holly finds out the Slytherins can bring guests into their dorms when she witnesses Marcus Flint leading a mind-controlled Penelope Clearwater to a pre-arranged sexual assault. Holly tells Percy Weasley, and then at some point in the next day loses any memories of the incident. Holly brings Hermione up to speed and they agree to keep it between them until they figure out who was involved in both the assault and Holly's Obliviation. Holly's virginity is verified intact. Discovering Flint is only being expelled 'for undisclosed reasons', Holly takes revenge on Flint, signing her work as the Spider. At Christmas, Holly and Hermione try out their Polyjuice unsuccessfully. Holly has an allergic reaction and reverts to herself immediately, and Hermione is turned into a cat-girl. Holly consoles Hermione by stroking her kitty.

Holly Evans and the Spiral Path

Chapter 9: Sifting For Truth

26th December, 1992

Dear Harry,

I feel I need to explain something. Ever since I started using the Quick-quotes Quill, I have gotten into the habit of turning it on when I sense that a conversation might get interesting or reveal something important. Plenty of things happen that I choose not to have transcribed here. Usually I just include the most important or comprehensive conversations so I have a record of facts to refer back to, and to give you a sense of what's going on and how I handle things. I would not have included that entire encounter before, if I had transcribed it later. It was private, and I doubt Hermione would forgive either of us should anyone else even suspect what went on. For my part, it was a bizarre experience from start to finish, but I can't say it wasn't thrilling as well. I haven't had much experience in giving good feelings to others. Hermione's enjoyment was intoxicating. I felt electrified, knowing she was happy from responding to my touch. I can't say this has anything to do with sexual preference. I guess I

prefer people I can trust, and so far my market for love has a single occupant. Nothing against you, but we still haven't met, and besides you're my brother, so we'll have to relate to each other that way. I can't broach the subject with Hermione right now anyway. She is mortified enough by her feline transformation. Mme. Pomfrey is still checking with her resources, but she has indicated that while Hermione can be restored to just humanity, the solution will not be a quick one. I'm going to spend time with Hermione later tonight, so maybe I can cheer her up a bit.

Holly

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30th December, 1992

Dear Harry,

It's been a quiet yet difficult few days for me. At first, Hermione wouldn't say much of anything and didn't respond well to anything beyond holding my hand. She obviously wants the support however, as my hand hasn't left hers for more than a few hours at night ever since. I have the claw marks to attest to that.

Speaking of claw marks, Pansy had recovered quickly under Mme. Pomfrey's care, well before Christmas in fact, so she, Millicent and Draco have been haunting the castle trying to catch me unawares, no doubt for some sort of revenge. Their problem has been that for some reason I could sense when Pansy was near. It wasn't like a magical connection, more like I could pick up her scent. I mentioned it to Hermione yesterday morning.

"Perhaps it is a side effect of the Polyjuice potion."

"Yeah, but it is a bit distracting. I've been avoiding the Great Hall just to keep away from the overlap of her presence."

"You...you don't... fancy her do you?"

I immediately heaved out my breakfast on the floor.

"That would be a 'No', then."

"Got that right."

I felt a little woozy afterwards, but my 'Pansy sense' seems to have left me with the remains of my brekkers. Perhaps I had a little of the draught left in me.

Unfortunately with the Weasleys back at home for the hols and no one else left in the castle except professors, OWL students and our Slytherin counterparts, Hermione was stuck with me for company. It's been hard for me, as I usually only speak if I need to address something. Idle chatter escapes me. Thankfully, Hedwig decided to join us in quiet company this morning. I was surprised to see her, given the traditional enmity between cats and birds, but I think she can tell Hermione bears her no ill will. Hedwig couldn't stand the silence for long, though. I don't believe I've seen Mme. Pomfrey more beside herself as when she entered the ward to find Hed sitting atop Hermione's bed frame, chirping and clicking some story at us. I think Hermione greatly appreciated my creative interpretation of Hedwig's story- I have no idea if my Owl friend was truly in an epic battle with the Giant Squid over a low-flying pheasant they both felt they had first grip upon, but Hedwig kept chattering as I told the tale and only clipped me aside the head when I suggested that she gave up the prize too easily. Hermione is now beginning to approach her usual talkative habits, which relieves me from the pressure of making conversation. I think Hermione's return to conversational lead may also come from my habit of staring at her fur when I have nothing to say, but Hedwig is still blessed for being the ice-breaker.

Me, me, me, I, I, I. Sometimes I forget that this is more than just my journal. Thank you for the replacement trunk you sent for Christmas! Believe me, Hermione appreciates it almost as much as I do, as I've been mixing up her trunk's meticulous organisation with my clothes and personal items ever since my tea-stain induced misfire. It's much nicer than the one I bought myself originally. I am once more in your debt, kind sir.

Uh oh. Snape approacheth. I shall transcribe anon.

Transcription: 30th December, 1992 starting 4:31 PM GMT

Severus Snape (SS) approaches the hospital bed for Hermione Granger (HG). Holly Evans (HE) sits in a chair beside the bed. Hedwig (H.), a snowy owl is perched on the bed frame above HG's head.

SS stops his approach suddenly and stares. SS laughs suddenly and loudly. HE and HG exchange worried glances. SS calms his laughter and speaks then with a sneering whisper.

SS: Well, well. The owl, the cat and ...the spider. I should think a fairytale is being enacted before my very eyes.

HG: Professor...

SS: Do not speak, Miss Granger! I would prefer to maintain the illusion just a bit longer, and you have little to say that interests me at this moment. Better for you to listen with feline acuity.

HG looks down to her lap. HE squeezes HG's left paw in her right hand.

SS: I am here as our indomitable healer Madame Pomfrey requires my skills to rescue you from your own ineptness. I assume that your current state is the result of a Polyjuice mishap. I do not care to guess your purpose in attempting such an advanced formula. What I am here to guess, is that Miss Evans' recent assault on my House was used to cover her theft of the necessary materials from my private potions stores. Let me make this perfectly clear. If I find either of you attempting to access my private stores again, you shall regret it. Do you know what this is?

SS hold up a small vial of clear liquid.

HE: Poison?

SS scowls.

SS: Lethal response is only appropriate for lethal actions. This is Veritaserum, the most powerful truth potion known. A few drops of this and you will confess your darkest secrets to your worst enemy at the slightest prompting. Cross me again or attempt to violate the sanctity of my House, and my hand might just...slip over your pumpkin juice one morning.

SS swirls his cloak as he strides away towards the healer's office.

HE and HG follow SS's progress until he exits the room.

H.: (clikCLACK snurgle snurgle BARK)

HE: Yes, that was interesting, wasn't it?

HG: Let me try.

HE: Alright.

HG: (whispering) Professor Snape knows you're the Spider, but he doesn't seem to care about what you did to Flint. He knows you trounced Pansy just to get the detentions, but his only concern was the robbery. He thinks I'm useless and he knows we have secrets we don't want revealed. How'd I do?

HE: A good start.

HG: What else?

HE: Well, he doesn't think you're useless, as he's impressed with your Polyjuice brewing. He knows the only reason it didn't work was because of the cat hairs. It wasn't a bad batch or you wouldn't have been cat-ified. Also, he knows we were trying to break into the Slytherin dorms...

HG: But he said he wouldn't guess why we were trying to brew the potion.

HE: Exactly. He doesn't have to guess. He did warn us not to try again; 'don't violate the sanctity of my House'. He's not talking about

his rooms. Plus, his knowing I am the Spider means he knows at least some of what happened to cause Flint's comeuppance. That puts me too close to the Slytherin dorms for coincidence. The fact that he told us means he either didn't know about or didn't approve of my Obliviation.

HG huffs.

HG: Well now we're undone.

HE: Not exactly. Two more things; first, my detente still stands.

HG: Oh, really?

HE: Of course. Do you think he would have bothered to inform us of anything if war was declared? You'd simply be left like this until sent to specialists and I would be under the influence of the Veritaserum at the return feast.

HG: And the other?

HE: Professor Snape just told us he keeps a truth serum at hand. If anyone was holding back information about a threat to the school, he would use it. The Slytherins don't know anything more than he does about the Heir, and he doesn't know who it is or he would have caught them by now.

HG: Perhaps he's holding back because the Heir hasn't attacked any Slytherins yet. Maybe he is the Heir, and he's removing students who annoy him! Only a Gryffindor and Hufflepuff have been attacked as of yet.

HE: I think you and I are the greatest threats to Slytherin supremacy around here, academically or on the pitch. The only damage we've suffered of late has been self-induced. Besides, Snape was here back in the 70's, but the Chamber wasn't opened back then.

HG: How did you ever learn how to read people's intentions like this?

HE looks at HG darkly.



HE: Necessity, Hermione.

HG smiles weakly. HE nods back in understanding.

HG: Speaking of necessity, I was hoping you could get Advanced Potion-Making from my trunk.

HE: Why?

HG: It has the keys for recognising potion ingredients when using Scarpin's Revelaspell. If I had thought to use that on the potion before I drank it, I might have avoided my current circumstance.

HE: It probably wouldn't be a bad spell to try on the return feast.

HG: I don't think I'll have the spell worked out before then, and it will take more time for me to teach it you, especially with paws. Why would you want it for the feast?

HE: In case I'm dead wrong about the detente. Snape may have just been teasing us about what he will do, so we are further humiliated when we realise he warned us ahead of time.

HG: That would be cruel!

HE nodded as she leaned forward to rest her head on HG's knees.

HE: But totally in character. My head hurts. I'm going to nap here. I'll get your book after dinner.

HG giggles.

Transcription ends.

Holly

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3rd January, 1993

Dear Harry,

Happy New Year.

It might seem unbelievable, but I have been wanting to be sent to the Headmaster's office ever since my sorting. Yesterday I finally was summoned there by a note left for me on Hermione's bed stand. First, I'll explain my interest and then I'll transcribe what the Headmaster and others had to say.

When we were first brought to Hogwarts, all us firsties were led to the front of the Great Hall to be sorted into a House. The actual choosing is performed by an animated floppy hat that first sings a song about what the Houses represent, then each student puts on the hat and their House is announced.

My sorting wasn't typical, I would guess.

Professor McGonagall placed the Hat on my head, where it sunk down to cover half my head. Then I heard a voice in my mind that matched the Hat's singing tenor. For some reason the whole experience was making me giddy, or I would not have been so mouthy with the Hat.

'Well, what have we here? A good brain, plenty of courage and a burning desire to prove yourself. But where to place you? I think Slytherin may be the best fit...'

'Not to be rude, but Professor McGonagall...'

'It's McGonagall, dear. Call her Prof McG if it's a mouthful.'

'Right, well I don't think she would think Slytherin would be best for me.'

'Why so?'

'Everyone I've met including her would expect me to be sacrificing cats by the end of the week. If I'm truly meant to be cunning and ambitious, I'd rather start with a low profile.'

'Oh, I like you. You're trouble. But wait, what's this? I can't sort you properly!'

'Sorry? Did I do something wrong?'

'My dear, I would like to take more time to discuss your situation, but I'm afraid I would be tempting Fate itself should I say anything but...'

"GRYFFINDOR!"

'...however, come and see me another time and we'll chat.'

Prof McG lifted the hat from my head and I started to leave for the Gryffindor table in a daze, when I decided to grab the hat from her hands and put it on again.

'Back already, are we?'

'Sorry, but I don't know your name or where to find you.'

'I am the Sorting Hat, else called Adrian. To find me, find your way to the Headmaster's office. Ask a prefect for directions, or perhaps if you perform enough mischief you'll find yourself there regardless. Now, off with you. I'm on duty!'

I handed back the Hat to the startled professor and headed quickly to the table. Hermione asked me later about why I went back and appeared quite mortified that she hadn't thought to ask its name either.

During my first year, I really was just overwhelmed with learning about the magical world, and tracking the foolishness that led to exploding heads. I also wasn't keen on grabbing the Headmaster's attention then. Events this year have led me to believe that my intentions of living a life of anonymity are a lost hope, but I still prefer

to keep my distance from the Headmaster. It's hard to do that when you're sent an engraved invitation.

The note included directions to his office as well as a password; 'Lemon Drop'.

The Headmaster's office is about as quirky as one would imagine it should be when owned by the world's greatest living wizard. In addition to the unexplainable instruments and ancient tomes with faded titles in their binding, he also kept a pathetic looking bird on a golden perch. Arranged in nearly every open wall space were portraits of the former head-masters and -mistresses of Hogwarts, collectively doing the worst impression of appearing asleep as I've seen. There were two windows, one on the East wall looking out over the lake and the other on the West wall with a view of the Quidditch pitch. I found Adrian propped up on a wig stand tucked amidst some shelves mounted directly behind the massive wooden desk at the center of the chamber, a bit above my reach.

Transcription: 2nd January, 1993 starting 8:54 AM GMT

Holly Evans (HE) sits in a chair in front of a large desk, addressing Adrian the Sorting Hat (A.).

HE: Should I...

A.: We can speak openly if you wish, my dear.

HE: Right. Sorry I haven't been to visit before now. I guess my antics haven't been of enough concern to bring me here. I'd hate to have disappointed you.

A.: You have met the Headmaster under other circumstances. I have heard well of your antics. Don your goggles, my dear. You'll see things more clearly that way.

HE: Sure...

HE pulls her goggles down over her eyes from her forehead.

A.: Bee in your bonnet, Evans? I thought you might have a question or two for me after our last conversation. You gave me quite a chuckle, and that's rare. I only ever speak to eleven-year olds and the Headmaster, after all.

HE: You said I should be sorted into Slytherin. Were you hoping they would break me or that I would start killing them?

A.: Neither my dear. I thought you might raise the bar of their performance. Show them what a survivor's cunning is truly like. Sadly, I think Salazar's legacy has been usurped by the privileged.

HE: Do you know what is contained in the Slytherin library?

A.: Oh, Ho! My most important role in this office is the keeping of confidences. I'm afraid their secrets will have to wait for your skills to exceed their defenses. I have a standing bet with several Professors on the outcome.

HE: Fair enough. What did you mean when you said you couldn't sort me? How is fate involved in my life?

A.: Fate has marked you, much like that scar upon your forehead. I know little more than that, but Fate desires your courage. Already you must feel how much your actions seem to affect the larger community. You are to have a theme in the Great Symphony, my dear. Only you can determine its tone and timbre, by every choice that you make.

HE: I ...am a bit lost. What...?

A.: Have you met Fawkes? The Headmaster keeps his Phoenix close at hand when he's close to...

A sickly bird on a golden perch is suddenly engulfed in flames. HE jumps from her chair in surprise.

HE: Bloody grief!

A.: ...and there he goes. The next time you head off on an adventure, consider bringing me along. My view is limited and I know you'll see something extraordinary, the way things go.

HE: Like this doesn't count?

Albus Dumbledore (AD) enters the room from a door behind the desk.

AD: Oh, please Miss Evans. Don't rise on my account. I see Fawkes has finally moved on. He always looks so forlorn as he approaches a burning day.

AD sits down in the large armchair behind the desk. HE drops back into her chair.

HE: Sir, I hope spontaneous avian combustion isn't catching. Hermione and Hedwig are really getting along, and I won't be able to keep her company as often once classes start.

AD: Holly, as the Hat has mentioned, Fawkes is a phoenix. It is appropriate for him to ignite. They are immortal, periodically burning up to renew their bodies from the ravages of time and experience. Extraordinary creatures, phoenixes. They are incredibly loyal, their song can calm troubled hearts, they can carry heavy loads even when flying and their tears have remarkable healing properties. They are symbols of the Light.

The pile of ash left on the golden perch begins to stir. A baby bird emerges and shakes off some ash from its first feathers.

HE: Brilliant.

AD: Quite.

HE: Sir, why did you want to see me?

AD: I felt I needed to give you the opportunity to answer a question. Now, is there anything you'd like to tell me?

HE: Wow, that was really three turns around. Is there something you'd like me to tell you?

AD: You have such a lovely face my dear. Why don't you take off those atrocious goggles?

HE: You're freaking me out, sir.

HE pushes her goggles up to her forehead.

AD: I am simply trying to understand your involvement in recent events.

HE: But you haven't asked me anything.

AD: Are you sure there is nothing you'd like to tell me?

AD suddenly sits up straight, looking uncomfortable.

HE: I don't think so, sir.

AD: Well! On your way then.

Transcription ends.

At the point Professor Dumb was pushing for a definite answer to his very open question, I had a thought flash through my brain, that I'd like to tell him if he keeps wasting my time with this I'll do to him what I did to Flint. I'm fairly sure he picked that right out of my brain. If you doubt me on this, let me explain what Hermione found out in Perenelle's notebook today.

Hermione has been feeling the isolation of a hospital bed, so she threw herself into working on the puzzle front of Perenelle's notebook. It has the added advantage that Hermione's claws won't puncture the surface as she tries to work on it, unlike how she shredded the edges of her Advanced Potion-Making guide. Hedwig's no help on the page turning tasks, although she seems to be giving Hermione some cues on how to solve the next puzzle on the notebook's cover. Hedwig is such a clever owl.

Hermione's breakthrough to the third section revealed that Obliviation can be unmasked. Perenelle described a magical way of sifting through another's mind called Legilimency. The basic spell is simple enough, though illegal to use unless you are, or are being trained by a licensed Legilimancer. Using the skill once contact has been made is the more challenging part, as untrained mind sifting can be damaging to both sifter and siftee. What's more is unless they hear you say the spell, they wouldn't know you were doing anything wrong. Masters of the art are able to initiate an attack without wand or word, simply by gazing into the victim's eyes, though there is often a telltale change in the caster's face that alert observers may see. Legilimency is countered by Occlumency, blindness, or an appropriately distracting hammer to the forebrain.

The Bad news is the technique described for recovering a victim from Obliviation requires advanced skills in Legilimency and the Memory Charm, to properly recognize a masked memory and enable the Legilimens to break the binding while still in the victim's mind. The Good news is this section has notes on how to learn Occlumency, so that when Hermione and I start trying Legilimency, we can defend our minds and prevent a bad sifting experience. The other Bad news is that Professor Dumbledore has been using mind sifting on me and probably anyone else he wants answers from. The other Good news is that Adrian likes me better than Dumbledore; he warned me to wear my goggles when facing the Headmaster, who got flummoxed until he made me take them off.

Hang on; he MADE ME TAKE THEM OFF! The Quill even changed writing to show a spell was in use!

Why else would I do that?

Occlumency is my only priority now. DO NOT TELL THE HEADMASTER. I will know if he starts to interfere that you have betrayed my trust. I mean it, Harry. I will find you and hurt you. I will pluck out your eyes to keep my secrets safe. Sleep well.

With love,



Holly

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A/N: Adrian describing Holly as likeable trouble came from the Babylon 5 episode "Voices of Authority", but there it was Draal talking with Susan Ivanova. Who's to say the Hat doesn't channel ideas to J. Michael Straczynski?

## Chapter 10: Tainted Love

24th January, 1993

Dear Harry,

I haven't written for a while. Maybe you can guess why. While the headmaster didn't seem to be interfering with our studies in mind magic, Hermione and I had come to the conclusion that the less written to you, the less you could accidentally reveal. I'll try and transcribe the Occlumency study guide in the back pages of this journal for you to learn. Learning to defend your mind can't be a bad idea, but I guarantee it takes time, as neither of us has got it down to a skill yet.

Anyway, the reason I am finally breaking down to communicate with you is that I had a conversation with Prof McG that explains a few things.

Transcription: 24th January, 1993 starting 8:46 AM GMT

Minerva McGonagall (MM) is sitting at a desk in an office. Holly Evans (HE) is sitting opposite the desk, nervously bouncing her right leg in place.

HE: Why did you want to see me Professor?

MM: It has come to my attention that you are under a great deal of stress lately.

HE: Well, my best friend was the laughingstock of the school until Hagrid let it slip that I can speak with snakes, so now the school thinks I'm the Heir of Slytherin and trying to murder the impure, despite the fact that my best friend happens to be one when she's less feline. So, yes, I have been feeling a bit ...off.

MM: Yes, well I believe some of your anxiety may actually be my fault.

HE: Your fault, Professor?

MM: When I gave you your journal, I saw that you didn't have much trust in others. I could foresee you having a difficult time here, even without your connections to famous boy heroes and such. I know how important it can be to have a repository for your thoughts and feelings, especially in our world. Your journal was already enchanted to prevent intrusion and to link it to its brother, so I added-another-subtle-charm-to-encourage-you-to-use-it.

HE: I'm sorry, Professor. You said that last bit very quickly. Did you just say I am compelled to write in my journal?

[pause]

Professor?

MM: Well, yes. I also mentioned that it is protected and that you shouldn't be afraid to continue using it. In fact, you will find it most relieving to do so at this point.

HE: Professor McGonagall, I feel you owe me right now. You have deliberately manipulated me supposedly to increase my sense of trust.

MM: Yes, well, I hope you can find some comfort in knowing I'm very poor at this sort of deception from a lack of practical experience.

HE: Strangely, I do. You still owe me. I would like an oath from you. A magical oath.

MM: What sort of oath did you have in mind?

HE: Tell me the truth, for once.

MM picks up her wand from the desk and holds it in front of her pointing to the ceiling.

MM: By my magic, I swear I shall tell the truth for the rest of this meeting, unless by doing so I would violate any other oath I may be under; in such circumstance I shall simply state 'I cannot say'. So mote it be.

HE: Um, okay. I mean...So mote it be.

A tendril of magic swirling around MM's wand splits into two threads that strike both occupants of the room.

HE: My journal; how is it protected? How is it linked to Harry? What spells are on it?

MM: Your journal is protected by a sealed Secrecy Charm that only allows you to open it. It has a Notice-Me-Not charm to prevent others from finding it when it is closed. I added the Compulsion Charm when I enchanted it to automatically add new pages as it is used. I believe you have also learned to cast the secrecy charm from Miss Granger to protect the contents from others as you write. The journal is linked by a Protean Charm to its companion volume, such that everything written in it appears in the companion.

HE: ...and Harry reads it?

MM: Harry Potter sees everything you write.

HE: About Harry; how much contact does the Headmaster have with him?

MM: I believe the Headmaster has spoken to Harry a few times, but they rarely interact.

HE: Does the Headmaster read the journal?

MM: No, he has no access to it, by the same secrecy charms that apply to yours.

HE: What is Harry like?

MM: I cannot say.

HE: What do you mean you...oh, sorry. I should have picked up on the phrasing.

MM: Quite.

HE: Can you remove the Compulsion?

MM: All the enchantments were sealed under the same warding runes. It would require all the spells to be removed and re-added. You would lose the content. I am sorry.

HE: Why have I been able to stand not writing in it up until now? I mean, I barely wrote in it last year.

MM: The Compulsion Charm takes effect slowly as the pages are used. The more you write in it, the more you will feel the compulsion. Lately you've been studying Occlumency, which allows you to resist external influences.

HE: Have you ever considered a job as a drug dealer?

MM: Not until you just mentioned it.

HE: I didn't mean...never mind. So I can use the journal to help test my Occlumency progress?

MM: I believe so. I am not well-versed in Occlumency. Professor Snape would be the authority amongst the staff.

HE: What are the answers on our next Transfiguration test?

MM: The next test is a practical exam. I am sure you and Miss Granger will do well. Are you about through? We do have class in a few minutes.

HE: One more thing. Does Dumbledore read people's minds regularly?

MM: I cannot speak to his habits, but the Headmaster has been known to do so for the Greater Good, as he would put it.

MM starts to rise from her chair.

HE: Professor, did you know my mother?

MM moves to sit at the edge of the desk.

MM: Yes, I did. I taught Lily all seven years and was proud to have her as a prefect for Gryffindor and as Head Girl . Lily was a startling talent, attractive and popular. She picked up a wicked sense of humour in her last few years.

[pause]

Lily loved you very much.

HE gasps and looks into MM's eyes. MM smiles.

HE: Thank you, Professor.

Transcription ends.

I'm fairly certain I now know how a heroin addict feels at the end of a dry spell. I was beginning to have nightmares about angry quills chasing after me as I slid on giant pages like slides at a water park. They were replacing my more common nightmares about exploding heads and trolls erupting like overripe pimples, so this is a mixed blessing.

I am still kicking myself for the million questions I could have asked Prof McG during that meeting. Still, what I got answered has been meaningful for me in a number of ways. Prof McG knows that Mum loved me. She knows it, not like it's just a belief. Minerva saw that love somehow.

Anyway, now that security has been addressed, I can let you in on a few recent events.

I could see that Hermione wasn't going to well handle the attention that would be coming her way once the students returned and discovered her condition. It is one thing when a schoolmate does something embarrassing; the average student will tease them mercilessly for a day or two, happy that they aren't the center of

attention until something else draws the focus of the mob. It is something different when a student ostracized for being more capable than any of her peers and quite a few of the older students is finally caught in a public and humiliating mistake. The only way to offset that sort of feeding frenzy is with a scandal. Revealing my moment with Hermione would fit the bill for sex and intrigue, but wouldn't preserve her reputation or sanity in the least. I wasn't going to confess to being the Spider, as it would lead to expulsion and possible jail time. That left the question of whom the Heir of Slytherin might be; that's why I chose to leak my Parseltongue ability to the hungry masses through Hagrid. It turned out to be a good idea beyond what I had planned, mostly. I originally transcribed this to a loose parchment, so I could copy it in later, which ends up being now.

Transcription: 7th January, 1993 starting 6:18 PM GMT

Rubeus Hagrid (RH) hands a cup of tea to Holly Evans(HE), then sits down across from her in front of his hearth.

RH: 'At's a poor bit o' luck, 'Ermione gettin' teased an' all.

HE: She's really trying to keep a good face on it, but I can tell the teasing is hurting her. I wish I could lend her some of my indifference.

RH: Ye've a good heart and a good hide, there Holly. Ye don' look ta be in bright spirits either, tho, if'n I might say.

HE: Hagrid, do you ever wish you could talk to the animals? I mean, the ones that don't talk with humans already.

RH: Well, it isn't like the ones that can't speak probably have that much to say. There be special wizards what can speak to certain kinds o' animals, but I doubt ye'd get a conversation from an earthworm, now would ye?

HE: So what's the lower limit?

RH: Beg yer pardon?

HE: Well, in the muggle world, scientists don't expect much communication from anything without a brain they can see, yet birds aren't particularly large-headed and I think Hedwig could outsmart half the Gobstones team. So what's the smallest creature that you'd expect to communicate?

RH: Well, ye've got two different notions there Holly. Hedwig is a post-owl an' yer familiar besides, so she'd outsmart any normal owl jest by bein' magical. Fer a normal critter, well Fang here has enough sense to run from danger, yet he'll stick by me side when we visit the Acromantulas.

HE: Acro-whats, now?

RH: Acromantulas- they're large intelligent spiders, an' right talkative too. Ye don' even need ta speak a special language. Aragog talks the King's English right proper, better 'n I do at any rate!

HE: Aragog is your friend, and he's a giant spider?

RH: I raised 'im from a wee thing, an' even found him a wife when the time came.

HE smiles widely.

HE: That was very considerate. I would love to meet him.

RH: Really? Most folks give the deeper forest a wide berth ta keep from meetin' Acromantulas. Even the centaurs keep their distance except when in numbers.

HE puts down her teacup and begins to use her hands while talking.

HE: Well, when I was younger I used to watch the spiders in my room build their webs and such. I tried talking to them but they never said anything back. I think it would be wonderful to talk with Aragog just to know what the spider thinks as they spin, as they lie in wait and all.

RH: I knew there was a reason we got along!



HE: Cheers! So what other types of super creatures are there?

RH: How do you mean?

HE: Well, the Acromantulas are super spiders, the post-owls are super owls, dragons are like a super lizard I suppose.

RH: They are not! Dragons are a breed apart they are! The very notion! You're having me on a bit aren't ye?

HE: Yeah, a bit. What you said earlier, about wizards talking to certain animal types; is there a dragon language?

RH: Not that Charlie Weasley has ever mentioned, tha's fer sure. No, the only sort that might talk ter dragons would be a parseltongue, one that speaks to snakes.

HE: Well, I've spoken to snakes, and I can say that Norbert never said anything that I could understand.

RH: Well, Norbert was jes' a wee tyke an'...Oi! Yer havin' me on again aren't ye?

HE: What? No, I didn't hear Norbert say anything, I swear.

RH: Not that! Ye jes' said ye can talk with snakes!

HE: Well, yeah. I mean I only did it once when we were at a zoo for my cousin's birthday. That said, I have been hearing some disturbing whispers in the halls lately.

RH moves his chair in closer to where HE is sitting. RH stares into HE's eyes.

RH: Holly, this is important. Ye're not talkin' with snakes, asking 'em to do anythin' are ye?

HE: Hagrid, what are you on about? You're making me nervous! What's wrong with talking to snakes? You talk to spiders, which I'd love to do. It wasn't my choice to be able to talk to snakes!

RH: Now, don't get upset! Ye're jes' not meant to have that talent- it doesn't normally show in any but Dark Arts practitioners ye know?

HE: I'm dark? You think I'm dark? Hagrid, how could you?

HE stands up quickly and exits the hut in a tearful rush.

Transcription ends.

Sometimes I love being a girl, just because we can seem to have an emotional outburst about almost anything without people being any the wiser. It took about three days for Hagrid to express his worry about offending me to someone in enough company that the cause of my grief became widely known, happily just as Hermione's catastrophe was beginning to gain momentum. Unfortunately, I hadn't predicted a side-effect of being her scapegoat and her partner in potions mishaps at the same time; people are starting to think I was experimenting on her. Ron outmaneuvered me by visiting Hermione to warn her of my newest dark tendency while I was chatting with Hagrid a week later. I had to assure him I had forgiven him for the slip of the tongue. Hermione told me about Ron's visit after, saying he was actually kind of sweet with his concern. I asked her if she allowed him to stroke her fur. She didn't take it well.

Actually, Hermione is a bit upset with me for other reasons. It seems I'm making real progress in Occlumency while Hermione is stuck at the first step. The instructions from Perenelle's notebook indicate beginning in mind magics is best served by organising your mind. Hermione had that going anyway. The trick here is that while my mind may not be organised, I have developed a tendency to misdirect and hide my emotions and intentions as a matter of survival. If anything, Hermione's organised mind would only make it easier for me to sort through and find a memory. I say it would, as Hermione hasn't actually let me try Legilimens on her yet. It's a fair cop- I haven't offered to let her try me either, as I'm afraid of what she'll think if she sees how I truly see things, and what I've gone through to arrive at these attitudes. I'd trust her before anyone else, but I'd rather see her defenses shored up before we take that step.

In the meantime, we test our Occlumency by trying to resist the effect of spells that Occlumency can affect, like the Notice-Me-Not charm and Compulsion charm. They're fifth- and seventh- year spells, but we got a handle on them fairly quickly. I think some spells are learned later for what can be done with them, rather than how hard they are to cast.

I first tried Legilimens on Hedwig. I think she approved, as I felt no resistance when I started the spell. At first I was disoriented, seeing with her mind's eye while still viewing the dorm room. I quickly learned to close my eyes for these experiments. Hedwig showed me the actual course of events when she played tug-of-war with the Great Squid. I could feel myself, as her, pulling and struggling with the pheasant's wing in my beak and one claw gripping its neck, my wings beating furiously to dislodge my prey from this interloper's tightening grip. Eventually the pheasant pulled apart and I, rather Hedwig kept the wing for enjoyable snacking. I then flipped to a second memory, of swooping over the lake and snagging an errant mouse that had unwisely chosen to venture out in the winter cold. I as Hedwig swooped down silently and snatched it up before it knew it was in danger. Then I beat my wings heavily to gain altitude until I could fly into the hospital ward window. I landed on Hermione's bed frame and dropped the now dead mouse on her bedside table. Imagine my surprise when Hermione smiled up at me weakly and popped the mouse into her mouth. The memory ended with Hermione speaking in what seemed like a foreign tongue, but I could understand that the intention was gratitude and a bit of girly collusion. I think this may become my favorite topic in magical learning. Too bad I don't have a teacher for it.

Holly

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28th January, 1993

Dear Harry,

Hermione will be discharged in about a week. I was heading out from visiting her when I saw that Myrtle had flooded her loo again. I went

to see if I could offer her a sympathetic ear. Since Sir Nicholas was made smoke-like and unresponsive during the attack on Justin Finch-Fletchley back in December, I haven't had much ghostly contact.

Transcription: 28th January, 1993 starting 8:04 PM GMT

Myrtle Henderson's (MH) ghost erupts from a lavatory stall as Holly Evans (HE) enters the room.

MH: Who goes there? What do you want? Go away!

HE: Myrtle, it's Holly. I know someone has been unkind to you. Why don't you come out here and tell me what happened?

MH: Oh, Holly it was awful!

HE: I know, people can be so cruel...

MH: Well, don't interrupt!

HE: Sorry.

MH: Oh, Holly it was awful! There I was hanging around the u-bend when that flame-haired trollop with the wandering eyes comes rushing in here and chucks a book through me! That sordid little twat should be strung up by her pigtails and spun until she spews out what little value her still breathing corpse carries in this rotting world!

HE: Ginny threw a book at you?

MH: Yes, and it wasn't even a valuable book. Just some crusty old diary without any writing in it at all! The least the little bint could've done is leave me some juicy wank fantasies to share! Honestly, it's like they don't tell these schoolgirls the least bit about decently sharing their tawdriness with the walking dead. Don't they teach anything about ghosts?

HE: I'd take that up with Binns- history is his domain.

MH: Oooh! Do you think I should? Seems to me the subject is sorely lacking in diversity!

HE: I guarantee 4/5ths of the students would agree wholeheartedly.

MH: Well, what's wrong with the rest of them then?

HE: There are always troublemakers.

MH: Oh, I'd kiss you, but you're a girl.

HE: (subvocal) ...and not ethereal.

Transcription ends.

In case you are wondering, that's what Hermione meant when she said I can handle ghosts like untrained puppies. It really only applies to Myrtle. I got a handle on her early when I realised no one ever asked her what her last name was. After that she chatted with me and I picked up her pattern- let her rant, then give her a mission that won't cross a house ghost or put her against Peeves the Poltergeist.

I retrieved the diary Myrtle mentioned. Hermione and I will have to give it a go- there's no way a girl gets upset at an empty diary, so there must be enchantments on it. Ginny has been weirder lately and this is the first clue I've gotten that might shed some light on her change in behavior. If you think I'm rotten for trying to read her diary, keep in mind that I never trusted this journal writing in the first place. The only reason I continue writing in this one is that it has saved me from a critical mistake, plus Minerva has me strung out on it now. If Ginny's diary turns out to be nothing but dreams and gossip, I'll find a way to get it back in her hands without compromising her secrets, and preferably without her knowing I read it.

As to Ginny's more bizarre behavior, she approached me in the common room about two weeks ago, asking me to forgive her for talking about my scars and the loaned dress. I wasn't going to give her an opening, but Ron was there and insisted that it was out of character for her and I should let the girl have a firstie moment. Later, she showed up in my dorm room and asked to see me in the dress

again. It was creepy, as for one thing the dress she gave me was a light cotton summer thing. I could tell she was waiting for me to undress and put on the frock, in the way you'd expect a degenerate uncle at a family reunion to ask to watch over the girls in their swimsuits 'for their safety'. I told her that it was winter and she could have it back for all it mattered. Then she said something that threw me more.

"It's not like you wouldn't enjoy taking your clothes off for another girl, even if I'm not Hermione."

I acted like she had just reminded me that Hermione was waiting for my copy of our homework assignments and dashed out and returned back to the hospital wing. I couldn't bring myself to tell Hermione what Ginny said, though. Now I'm thinking maybe I should have.

The other strange Ginny incident happened two days ago. I was leaving the Great Hall from lunch when Neville caught up with me and pointed out that Ginny had my wand that I had left behind at the table. There's no chance I would have lost track of my wand, but I asked her for it politely, as if she had done me a favor. Ginny looked surprised to see it in her hand, and handed it to me without hesitation.

I will be very interested in seeing what Hermione and I can glean from her diary. I can only hope Myrtle doesn't let her know I have it for a while.

Holly

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Valentine's Day, 1993

Dear Harry,

This has been too much fun, but I'll get to the good part after I catch you up. Hermione was cleared for departure on the first. She's almost normal; her hair's straighter, she doesn't sleep through the night and prefers eating meat- she kept the longer fangs, which balances out her larger front teeth which also seem smaller, but overall Hermione

is back to being human. That didn't save her from a resurgence in teasing the minute she started appearing in regular classes again. With that in mind, I spent another afternoon in Hagrid's hut, 'accidentally' mentioning the Sorting Hat's recommendation that I would do well in Slytherin. Hermione was saved from further torture from any but the Slytherin host, who were cowed slightly when I told them I didn't choose Slytherin because 'as the Hat said, Salazar's legacy had been compromised by the privileged but dim-witted'. Thankfully that happened outside Herbology class, as I wouldn't have been keen on Professor Snape hearing me say that. The skin on my hands is just finally growing back normal.

The investigation into Ginny's diary has been a tad bizarre itself. We can't find any rune work or enchantments upon it. Even Scarpin's Revelaspell had nothing to say, yet if you drip some ink onto the page, it disappears. Hermione also confirmed that this is the same diary that she saw Ginny exhaustively writing in all last term. She noted it because it is dated from the 1940's. The only identifying mark is the name scrawled on the inside cover: T. M. Riddle. Ginny looks beside herself, yet also seems a little more normal. She's been spending more time with Ron and the twins.

So, today is Valentine's, and that's where our fun begins.

Lockhart decided that Valentine's Day should be celebrated to the utmost, personally redecorating the Great Hall with the most lurid collection of purple, pink and red streamers and decorations. To top it off, he hired a cadre of dwarfs to dress up like cherubim to deliver written and occasionally, musical valentine's greetings to those who would pay for the service. Aside from the kickback he was receiving for the deliveries, I can only imagine that he saw the dwarfs as a comically cute distraction from the horrors of this year. In my eyes, they appeared to be rejects from some southeast asian porno film shoot. Obviously, it was tickling my sense of something, for when Lockhart suggested that we might ask Professor Snape to concoct a love potion to celebrate the day, I suggested to Hermione that she try out Scarpin's Revelaspell with the potion keys on our feast, just to be sure some concocting hadn't already occurred. Scarpin's will display a translucent scroll-like display above the object it is cast upon, so

when Hermione's component list started to scroll out above the Gryffindor table, we suddenly had some guests.

Transcription: 14th February, 1993 starting 6:12 PM GMT

Hermione Granger (HG) is sitting next to Holly Evans (HE) at the Gryffindor table, having just cast Scarpin's Revelaspell. Albus Dumbledore (AD) quickly approaches the students at the table, followed by Minerva McGonagall (MM) and Severus Snape(SS).

AD: What do you think you are doing Miss Granger?

MM: Indeed, I am impressed you have mastered Scarpin's spell so early in your career.

SS: ...And with the fluid checks included. Interesting...

AD: That will be 10 points from Gryffindor, Miss Granger, for casting spells outside of class.

HG: Um...

HE pours some pumpkin juice into a vial under the table and returns it to her robes.

MM: Really, Headmaster? I don't recall that rule, particularly for a diagnostic spell.

AD waves his hand and the scrolling result from HG's spell dissipates into a bluish mist.

AD: You will explain yourself, Miss Granger!

HE: Sir, Hermione cast the spell because I was concerned about Professor Lockhart's suggestion of the use of Love potions. I wanted to make sure no one had tainted our food with ill intentions.

SS: If anyone had tainted the food, I believe you would be the primary suspect at this point, Miss Evans.



HE: All the better then that Hermione cast it- one could not say that I fudged the results.

Several older students begin casting the spell on their plates and cups.

AD: Enough! The Valentine's feast is cancelled due to concerns about tampering. Evanesco!

All the food and beverages disappear from the tables in the Great Hall at the wave of the Headmaster's wand. The tables groan slightly from the sudden release in weight.

AD: Prefects, lead your houses back to your common rooms, where you will find sandwich platters and casks of drink will be provided shortly! Miss Evans, you will come to my office.

HE: What did I do, sir?

MM: Yes, what did she do?

AD: Never mind. I need to speak with the kitchen staff anyway. This conversation will wait for another day.

Transcription ends.

I'd like to be able to say that I got away with my sample of the juice, but the Headmaster was wily and his Vanishing spell caught the contents of my vial along with the rest of the feast. We had no proof, but I swear we should be able to use Hermione's memory as testimony:

"There was a loyalty draught mixed in with the juice and the pudding, utilising elements of the Philosopher's Stone along with some of the Headmaster's essence."

"Essence?"

"Usually that refers to a Vital humour."

"What do you mean?"

"I don't know what it means, all I remember is a reference to Vital Humours. It doesn't matter, I'm sure the Headmaster has our safety in mind with whatever he was doing."

"How do we purge a Loyalty draught?"

"There's a Cleansing draught, but it will take some time to brew. Madame Pomfrey probably keeps it in stock."

"I think I'm going to be sick."

"Really?"

"No, but we should head to the hospital wing anyway, just in case. Don't you think?"

"Alright."

Best wishes to you, Harry. Check your food.

Holly

## Chapter 11: Alone with Ghosts

13th March, 1993

Dear Harry,

I am embarrassed to say this, but I hadn't noticed until now that Hermione is suffering from PMS. I'm not referring to girl-plumbing issues, exactly; Hermione is drawing Positive Male Scrutiny the way she slinks about nowadays. Now that the shock of her return from isolation has worn off, it seems every able-bodied male in our year and the next few have noticed Hermione's developing body. Her leftover feline grace draws their eyes to her and her tendency to go without the tarp-like winter cloaks most students are still wearing to offset the lingering winter chill holds their attention further. She is developing breasts before anyone else in our year aside from a Hufflepuff named Eloise Midgen and Lavender, who started last year already as a B-cup and has swelled impressively since then (pretty soon Lav'll be pressed against some boy's chest just to support those things).

I finally caught notice of Hermione's burgeoning ...popularity when the Hufflepuff seeker Cedric OhmyGoddery, Cedric Please-dig-me turned his seeking eyes on her. He's been lurking about our library table of late making suggestions on homework assignments and class notes. Ron is circling the table as well, but hasn't tried to move in with Diggory being so ...helpful. Hermione is lapping up the attention, too. It bugs me on several levels, but the most pressing is that I can't hold her attention on the Ginny/Riddle diary investigation when she's like this. I can guarantee she's still pants at Occlumency. I can just hear her synapses burning out every time she smiles back at him.

I've decided to confront her on this. It reminds me of Lockhart too much, and I don't want to make a habit of hitting my friends.

Transcription: 14th March, 1993 starting 6:46 AM GMT

Hermione Granger (HG) rises slowly from her bed to sit with her legs folded beneath her, playing with her curly hair as it hangs in front of

her face. Holly Evans (HE) is standing facing her near the side of the bed.

HG: Cedric is quite tasty isn't he? I wouldn't mind playing with him for a while...

HE: What about the diary? Have you found out anything related to T.M. Riddle?

HG: No, I forgot.

HE: YOU forgot?!

HG rests back with her arms locked, her legs kicking out slowly, stretching her toes towards HE's legs.

HG: Yes, I forgot.

HE: You never forget anything! Don't you see? Your cat brain is becoming a rotting mass of hormones and distraction!

HG sits upright.

HG: I just don't want to give up these feelings! I'm comfortable in my body. I don't feel ashamed of my smile. I can tell boys want me, and I can let them know I want them too! It's so easy...

HE: What, like a charm?

HG: No, with smells. I think I'm releasing a pheromone somehow. And the smell of their response is ...delicious! I can even smell your scent...OH! Um, Holly?

HE: We're not getting into this right now.

HG: But, um, Holly?

HE grabs both HG's arms tightly in her hands.

HE: Listen. To. Me. Whatever else is going on, however else this may have made your life better, or more enjoyable, I have to ask you one simple question: With your mind like this, can you still help me find out who the real Heir is before somebody else gets petrified and they close Hogwarts?

HG: Well, but Holly...

HE: ANSWER THE QUESTION!

HG: No. There's no way. I can't focus on anything for long unless it smells good, or feels good. Oh, Holly...

HG starts to cry

HE releases HG and turns away in frustration.

HE: What now?

HG: Just as I said that, I could tell you didn't...you didn't ...you don't want me anymore!

HG starts crying again.

HE: You need to go back to Madame Pomfrey to finish your treatments. This isn't you.

HG: (sniffs) I know...

HE: As for the rest, let's table that for another time. I don't think either of us is ready to talk about it. Chalk it up to Spring fever. A strange season. Potion mishap recovery. Just come back to me when you feel like Hermione Granger again.

Transcription ends

Holly

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22nd March, 1993

Dear Harry,

Well that's better. As perhaps a side effect of Cedric's interest being pheromone-induced, his attention to Hermione has wandered off to focus on the Ravenclaw seeker, a Chinese girl named Chang, without any bad feelings or recriminations left behind. The rest of the boys sniffing after her have returned to their previously scheduled distractions, except for Ron and Seamus who haven't been able to lift their gazes from Hermione's chest in weeks. Hermione lost her fangs but her front teeth are smaller and more even than they used to be. I can't fault her for wanting to leave that last bit of correction alone. I'm fairly certain she suffered a number of beaver-related teasings in the past. Her smile is quite fetching now, actually.

Hermione and I were digging into Riddle's history in the library yesterday when Ron woke up from staring at Hermione's breasts long enough to mention Riddle was a student 50 years ago that won an award for Special Services to the school- he's 'polished the damn award enough times...' At that point the discussion reverted to whether Ron should hate me for those detentions Filch put him through. I told him he could hate me for whatever reason he wanted, as it's quite the vogue right now. Several Hufflepuffs that were sneering at me shuffled off to another part of the library then. With that as a marker for Mr. Riddle's place in history, Hermione and I were able to start working out a profile for him.

Tom (not Thomas) Marvolo Riddle was a Slytherin prefect and eventually Head Boy, attending Hogwarts from 1938-1945. He was awarded the Special Services medal in 1943. He graduated with top honors in 1945.

That took us four days to uncover. No matter where we look, we can't seem to find out why he got the medal. Special Services awards are like the old Empire Gallantry Medal- awarded for civilian heroism. To have no record of the event is just odd.

But at least Hermione is back to normal, for real this time. Although she is looking a little pale at the moment.

Oh, this was gross but funny.

I asked Hermione what was making her ill. She looked up from the volume she had been scouring and started waving her hand in front of her tightly clenched mouth, until she blurted out "I need a sack!" then started waving her hand again. I caught on when her face started to get a little green and jumped up to grab the hat off a firstie at the table behind me. I mean really- no one wears their hats outside of Feasts except firsties and the Professors. I tossed the hat to Hermione who promptly projected her previous meal into the wool chapeau. Once finished, Hermione sat back for a moment, glanced down at the sick in the hat, seemed to have a second thought and heaved once more into the hat. At this point the firstie realised how his hat was being used and began to protest; "Hey! You can't just...you...you're EVANS!" At this point he grabbed his books and ran from the library like he was being chased by a dragon. I turned back to Hermione who was sitting somewhat limply in her chair, still holding the hat.

That's when I made my latest error. I was trying to be helpful when I cast Evanesco at the hat in her hands- unfortunately my spell was successful and the hat vanished, leaving the sick to splatter all over Hermione's lap. Aghast, both she and I jumped up from the table, and I threw a Scourgify at her after a quick apology. Her look was a memorable mixture of indignation, illness and humiliation, with a last look of annoyance thrown in at me at the end.

"Holly, perhaps in the future if you wish to help me with a targeted spell like the Vanishing Charm you could attempt it with your goggles on!"

"Right. Again, sorry about that. What set you off anyway?"

"Oh, well, um..."

"Weren't you following up on Vital Humours?"

Hermione looked a little green again but she held herself together.

"Yes. According to Aristotelian tradition, the Vital Humours are the four fluids found in the human body that match with the four Aristotelian elements."

"And they are...?"

"Fire, Earth, Water and Air, of course."

"The Humours, Hermione?"

"Um, yes. Bile, Feces, Phlegm and Blood respectively, though Blood is representative of all four elements."

"At least one of which the Headmaster included in his Loyalty draught."

"That's right."

I tried very hard not to, but I ended up heaving onto the floor a minute later at that thought. Maybe I should start wearing my hat.

Holly

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28th March, 1993

Dear Harry,

Normally I don't bother telling you about these minor skirmishes with my enemies but this one was sort of fun, and was prompted by some odd behavior that I should probably take note of. Lately I have been travelling the hallways alone at night, either from escorting Hermione to her last few treatments in Pomfrey's care or returning from some janitorial detention with Filch. While I keep a wary eye out for stalkers and ambush situations, sometimes you can be over cautious and end up reacting badly to a wandering ghost. At first I thought that was what was happening, as I kept catching a glimpse of a pale girl who looked almost like Drowned Dorothea. The obvious difference was that Dorothea's head is turned backwards; her attempt to drown



herself in the Black Lake back in 1878 was interrupted by Grindylows that decided to divide her equally before she had actually passed on. Thus, I knew the straggly blonde wasn't Dorothea, but she was following me silently, always keeping her distance and evading my attempts to lead her into a passage where I could circle around to find out who she was. My latest attempt to catch her unfortunately led me into an ambush by the Slytherin Quidditch squad (minus Flint). Evidently they had been tracking me as I was tracking my pale stalker. The ambush was not expertly executed, however. They decided to try and intimidate me first.

I had rounded a corner and suddenly heard voices from in front and behind me start to hiss and make other snakey noises. While I'm certain this would have petrified any other student in the castle, as a Parselmouth it sounded a bit like the nonsense that babies make. They were trying to intimidate me with the snake equivalent of "Gah! Bububububububbbbthppthp. Yeee!" As I doubted that was all they had planned, I pulled a few things from my robes and set my goggles in place. They started getting chatty as they circled in on me from the shadows.

"Look at the little girl!"

"She's all alone in the night!"

"No one to protect her, no one to hear her..."

"Do you think your little wand can save you against us?"

"Silly little bint, that's no wand- you're holding a toy broom!"

"Bletch, she's starting something in her left hand..."

Which is when I jumped into action. The Slytherin behind and to the left of me must have noticed the glowing tip of my wand in my left hand as I had swirled it about, building up power. Now I released it, sweeping my wand in an arc above my head.

"Lumos Solaris"

The corona of near sunlight caused my attackers to cringe backwards in blindness, while my eyes were protected behind my goggles.

"Finite" was applied to my shrunken broom to bring it instantly to full size. Before they could react, I had mounted it and was skimming the ceiling headed back towards the main staircases.

"After her!"

You can't get much speed going within the corridors with only a three meter clearance, so I threw a "Confrigo" at the two opponents before me to clear my exit. The rest of the group chased after me as I darted forward, finally tilting upward as the main staircases came into view. As I rose past the second floor balcony, I caught a glimpse of Fred and George rushing towards the stairs from the other direction. They intoned a "Wicked!" in unison as they saw my upturned broom pass in front of them. As I leveled off around the fifth floor, I looked back down to see the Slytherins had rushed into the center of the stairwell only to be carpet bombed by the twins' collection of ink grenades, sneezing powder and dungbombs. I came to a landing next to them as they pulled back from the balcony. We shared a happy grin and a three-way handshake together just as Filch and Prof McG laid their hands on our collective shoulders.

The twins and I have chosen to serve our detentions with grace and decorum. We all wear our hats.

The moral of this tale? Preparation is important.

Holly

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30th March, 1993

Dear Harry,

Sometimes, acting out in frustration is exactly what's called for. I was so incensed about this diary business that I just started writing in the thing. What happened next I wish I could have recorded, but

circumstances prevented the Quill from helping, so I'll recount as much detail as I can muster.

I wrote:

How does this damned thing work anyway?

It responded:

Such language! My name is Tom Riddle. Who are you?

HE: Call me Holly. Are you the Tom Riddle that won the Award for Special Services to Hogwarts School in 1943?

TR: I am the very same. How did you come to find my diary, Holly?

HE: A girl I know flushed it down a toilet in frustration. I couldn't fathom why a girl would get upset over a blank diary, so I figured this must be enchanted.

TR: You're very smart, Holly. How did you hear about my award?

HE: A friend of mine cleaned it about fifty times for detention with the caretaker. We couldn't figure out why you received the award though.

TR: I caught the boy who opened the Chamber of Secrets and released a monster that killed a girl. Have you heard of the Chamber of Secrets before, Holly?

HE: Yes. The Chamber has been opened again and something is attacking students again.

TR: Perhaps if I show you how I caught the culprit the first time, you can figure out how to catch him again.

HE: How would you do that exactly?

TR: I can show you the memory of it stored within this diary.

At this point, the pages flipped themselves until they stopped at a date in June of 1943, but the box for the date had turned into a miniature telly. As soon as I brought the diary closer to see the detail in the screen, I was sucked into a memory of Tom Riddle talking to the Headmaster of that time, named Dippet. He looked even older than Dumbledore does now, frail and stooped. Tom chatted with Dippet about his background; his mother was a witch who died shortly after childbirth, his father was a muggle who disowned him so he lived in an orphanage. The situation with the Chamber was threatening Tom's chances to stay at Hogwarts instead of being sent back to the orphanage for the summer. Tom bumped into a younger version of Dumbledore, acting as Professor of Transfiguration, then Tom prowled the castle until he found a suspicious room. When he entered he confronted a school-age Hagrid, of all people, who was in the process of shoving a spider the size of my head into a box. Tom told Hagrid that monsters make lousy pets and that he felt that with a girl dead, Hagrid had to give up his pet and take his deserved punishment. Hagrid defended Aragog the Acromantula as never having hurt a person as he was stuck in the box whenever Hagrid was in class. Tom tried to zap the super spider with some sort of spider-freezing charm, but Aragog was agile and frightened enough to escape.

At this point, the memory froze and Tom Riddle turned to me and said "You see don't you? YOU see! You SEE!" He was getting a bit hysterical and then the memory went black.

The next thing I remember, there is sounds of a distant argument in the darkness. The argument gets louder and louder, though no more understandable, until it begins to hurt my ears. I screamed out "SHUT UP!" and I was suddenly awake again, my hands clutched to my head in a massive migraine headache. Hermione ripped back the curtains to my bed and nearly screamed. My face was covered in blood seeping from my scar! She dragged me immediately to see Madame Pomfrey. After a Calming Draught for both of us, some pain relieving potion and some crushed ice, I am feeling quite a bit better. I am also excited.

Tom's vision suggested that Aragog was the creature petrifying things. Obviously, Tom the diary is lying. If it were a spider running through

the pipes chatting about feeding time, I would have been able to hear other spiders before. Believe me; I've been trying to talk to spiders for a long time, with no results. I hear snakes, so the thing in the pipes is a snake of some sort. In one of Hagrid's conversations with me earlier this year, he suggested that spiders and snakes were somehow mortal enemies. I know this all fits together; I just can't see it yet. The best part is I figured out how to get the diary to work before Hermione did!

Holly

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1st April, 1993

Dear Harry,

Other than it being the twins' birthday, this day has been rotten. Ron caught up with Hermione and me in the hospital wing as Madame Pomfrey had insisted that we stay the night after my bleeding head wound issue. On the way back to the dorms he caught up a bit on our Riddle investigation, and immediately jumped to all the wrong conclusions- he thinks Hagrid knows how to open the Chamber, even though we know he doesn't. Ron also thinks Riddle must be a genius for coming up with a spider freezing charm. The boy has issues. So then we return to our dorm to find my trunk's been smashed apart again! Parvati and Lavender were beside themselves suspecting that the Heir was trying to punish me or something. I quickly redirected their confusion by suggesting that it might just be an April Fool's joke, what with the date and all. I fixed the trunk with a Reparo and did a quick inventory. There's only one thing missing. In our rush to get me treatment I had left the diary behind and it is no longer amongst my things. Ginny has the diary back. Hermione was quick to point out that we have no proof against her, but then she bolted out of the dorm room saying she needed to check something in the library. At this point, my migraine has returned. I'm going back to sleep, and we'll see if my subconscious can sort out this mayhem.

Holly

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2nd April, 1993

Dear Harry,

I can't talk with Hermione anymore. Hermione was petrified last night by the monster from the Chamber, just outside the library. I shouldn't feel so bad, I suppose. Penelope Clearwater was standing right next to her and she is dead.

That's right, the monster doesn't petrify by choice; it embodies the concept 'if looks could kill'. Sitting here looking at Hermione like a knocked over mannequin I can only assume the mirror in her hand prevented her suffering the full effect, much as Creepy Creevey's camera protected him. Justin Finch-Fletchley, the Hufflepuff that was stricken around the time I was taking revenge on Flint, saw the creature through Sir Nicholas' body, once again refracting the effect to prevent actual death. Filch's cat probably was hit from a reflection in the water Myrtle had released. Penelope had none of those mitigating circumstances so she just died, with a look of horror frozen on her face that no one can seem to correct. I asked Myrtle if that was what she remembered feeling as she died. All Myrtle could say was she couldn't pull her gaze from those sickly yellow eyes, and she was gone.

Myrtle.

Sir Nicholas.

Tom.

Penelope.

Hermione.

All ghosts in their way.

Even Percy seems to have lost his soul. I should have picked it up from the transcript when I tried to save Penny from the Slytherins. I

would have if I actually remembered the conversation; Percy fancied Penelope and now she is dead, and Percy is interred in a bed over there, on a regular drip of Dreamless Sleep potion and Calming Draught.

Ron went to visit Hagrid to ask him about the Chamber and Riddle. Hagrid barely had time to say "Follow the spiders!" to Ron before Hagrid was arrested by the Minister of Magic himself, Cornelius Fudge. Moments later, Lucius Malfoy pressed Dumbledore into a suspension, pending a full inquiry by the school's Board of Governors. Ron doesn't want to follow the spiders, as he is deathly afraid of them. I want to meet Hagrid's friend, but I think I know what he'll say, and it won't keep Hagrid out of prison. I doubt my voice would lend any credence to Hagrid's defense right now, either. In fact, I wouldn't be surprised if I am arrested soon. Curse my own skill at manipulating the mob.

As each person turns away, is frozen in fear, is captured or sidelined or killed, I feel like the Heir is slicing into my gut with a barbed knife. So here I sit, writing to hear myself think, looking at the expression of shock and surprise frozen on Hermione's face.

I love her.

It may be a sign of my desperation, but right now I think I love her enough to break the spell that holds her from me. If only...hang on.

Well, that didn't work. Bloody fairy tales rotting my brain; as if kissing her was going to do anything. Mind you it wasn't that pleasant a kiss, much like kissing a marble statue but with less dust. I did find this scrap of parchment tucked into her halter though. I only just noticed it as I heard the crinkle in her blouse when I was kissing her. Sorry m'love; first I kiss you now I'm feeling up your new breasts.

I can't help but laugh through my tears. The note shows she's been playing with people's names jumbled up. Gilderoy Lockhart becomes "OK Girly Lord, teach"; my name was mixed into "Holy Navels" or "Shy Love Lan"; Hermione's came out with quite a few. I prefer "Greenhorn Mirage" or "Her Mere Groaning". I particularly like your

name, Harry, jumbled into "Pyjamas the Terror". Hang on, there's more on the back.

"Tom Marvolo Riddle = I am Lord Voldemort".

Ladies and gentlemen we have just lost cabin pressure.

Ginny is being directed by Voldemort through HIS fucking diary. Somehow it carries his personality, like the portraits in the headmaster's office, only better at lying. She's the one controlling the giant snake that petrifies and kills. She can access it from Myrtle's lav, where she hides out when Hermione and I aren't brewing there. She has to be able to speak Parsel to control the thing, so the entrance is probably protected by requiring a Parsel password, much like the Slytherin dorm. That's why it hadn't been found in centuries. Then Voldemort came and let out the beastie to frolic. Only, to get Ginny to speak Parsel, he must have some connection to her that allows him to loan her his talents. As Ginny has been acting weird, except when we had the diary, he must be able to control her when she is carrying it. That's why Ginny knew about my attraction to Hermione- Riddle pulled a quick mind sift on me while riding in her head. Now Ginny has the diary back, and he aimed the monster at Hermione as soon as she could arrange it.

Damn her!

Ginny's been weird since the chasers harassed Ron into confessing about Quirrel. NO WAIT. She's been different since after the Diagon Alley shopping trip- where the Weasleys fought the Malfoys! Dobby knew this was coming. This was what he feared. He's a Malfoy elf; his pillowcase tunic had the monogram LCM- my bet is it was Lucius Malfoy's. I think the C stands for 'Caligula', but that's not relevant at the moment.

Hermione, in your honor, and because I have no intention of entering a dragon's lair until I'm a fully trained Amazon, I will take this to Minerva. Ginny can hang.

Holly



A/N: "Pyjamas the Terror" came from my best reviewer and preferred author Clell65619 in his story "Harry Potter and The Power He Has Not". I kiped the '...lost cabin pressure' line from the movie Fight Club, which Holly will love if she survives long enough to see it.

Next time: Cage match! The Spider Girl fights the Basilisk! Narrated by the Sorting Hat! (I hope you didn't think Holly would escape that fate; I've been looking forward to this for a while.)

Review this Story/Chapter

## Chapter 12: Pass with Your Best Violence

27th April, 1993

Dear Harry,

I just woke up from a nightmare. Prof McG left the Quill and a note beside the journal. The note said:

Dear Holly,

I took the liberty of recording the Sorting Hat's recounting of your experiences on the night of 2nd April using this extraordinary quill of yours. It may seem a small consolation at this point, but Gryffindor received 20 points for this innovative use of Charms and Rune work to modify an already enchanted object. I cannot tell you how sorry I am that you were forced to suffer through so much. Please come see me at any time if there is anything you wish to talk about. I will swear another oath to keep your confidences, if it would help.

Minerva McGonagall

"Prof McG"

This is what the Quill scrolled out:

Transcription: 3rd April, 1993 starting 8:11 AM GMT

Adrian the Sorting Hat (A.) is propped up on a wig stand on a desk in the center of an office. Minerva McGonagall (MM) is sitting behind the desk; Albus Dumbledore (AD) is sitting comfortably in a stuffed chair opposite. Severus Snape (SS) is slumped in a lounge chair to the side of the desk, holding an icepack to his head.

AD: Adrian, as you have been a primary participant in these events, surely you can give us some idea of what occurred down there? Three people are extremely injured, at least one on the very brink of death. There can be no argument that their privacy is somehow more important than knowing what has brought them to this state!

A.: I will tell the tale in my way Albus, but not because you feel it is necessary. Miss Evans has explicitly given her permission for me to recount this...

SS: She's in a coma! How could she have acquiesced to this?

A.: I asked her ahead of time.

AD: Perhaps, Severus, it would be best if we let the Sorting Hat proceed with a minimum of interruptions. I do not think any in this room would doubt the Sorting Hat's ability to discern truth from deception, so we can move forward with the assurance that what he says is accurate.

MM: I would agree to that.

AD: Incidentally Minerva, why did you insist on having this conversation in your Transfiguration office instead of the Headmaster's office?

MM: We are three flights of stairs closer to Poppy's domain should we be needed. Also, despite my recent term as your stand-in while you were on suspension, I have never quite been as comfortable surrounded by the former Headmasters' portraits.

AD: Very well. Please recount your tale, Adrian.

A.: Well, my involvement within this tale begins in the evening of the second of April, when I discovered a bit of a disagreement was occurring within the Headmaster's office. Professor McGonagall was holding court with Professors Snape and Lockhart in attendance, while our little hero stood to the side of the Headmaster's desk, looking unusually docile...

SS: (mumbling) Miss Evans is not my hero.

A.: Yes, she is. Now stop interrupting. As I said, Holly was looking unusually docile. The argument occupying these learned professionals concerned how to handle an opportunity to deal with the threat of Slytherin's monster that has plagued our fine school this

year. It seems Professor Lockhart had reasoned out that the threat could be tracked to a first year Gryffindor named Ginevra Weasley, that she had been accessing the entry to the Chamber of Secrets that was hidden in the second floor girls' lavatory, and that the entry was restricted to those who could speak the language of snakes, as Miss Evans has been rumoured to do. Checking with the wards and portraits, it was deduced that Miss Weasley was not within the castle proper, leading Professor McGonagall to conclude that Miss Weasley was down in the Chamber at that time. If there was ever a time to prove that Professor Lockhart's allegations were true, it was then.

Professor Lockhart was less than enthusiastic about leading an expedition into the Chamber, so it was decided that Professor Snape should accompany Holly and Gilderoy to see if the first part at least was true, while Professor McGonagall would contact Headmaster Dumbledore for assistance. Further discussion of Lockhart's research led the assembly to deduce that the creature in the Chamber was no less than a Basilisk, and well beyond the capabilities of those assembled to handle should a rescue be necessary.

With their tasks identified, the assembly moved to depart from the office when Miss Evans finally spoke. She asked whether I, Adrian the Sorting Hat, might be allowed to tag along on this mission. While startling most in attendance, Professor McGonagall moved immediately to my resting place and asked if I was amenable to such a venture. I agreed and was handed to Miss Evans, who promptly put me upon her head.

AD: Minerva?

MM: Yes, Albus?

AD: Why would you choose to put one of Godric Gryffindor's priceless artifacts in harm's way in this manner?

MM: It seemed a reasonable request, and the Sorting Hat had mentioned that he wished to accompany Holly when next she found herself embarking on some adventure.

AD: When did Adrian mention this to you Minerva?

MM: You were out.

A.: You are well aware how dull my existence has been, Albus. I believe you were present when I made the request of Miss Evans during her last visit to your office.

AD: Perhaps so. But...

SS: It's done! Can we move on?

A.: Quite so. Having been placed upon Miss Evans head, Holly initiated a silent conversation.

The voice of Holly Evans (HE) echoes from the bottom of the Sorting Hat

HE: Adrian, this is so fucked up.

A.: (addressing HE) Language, my dear!

HE: It's my head; you get no filters.

A.: Very well. What gathers your concern most?

HE: Well, I feel like I have a hangover. I also can tell I have two memories in my head that don't agree. The one set is what Lockhart has been spouting, while the other seems ...foggy.

A.: If I might suggest, you can isolate the first memories and concentrate on the edges of the second to liberate them.

HE: Sounds like something from Perenelle's notebook. I'll give it a try.

A.: (resumes narration) Holly continued to focus on her recent memories as we walked to our destination. Upon arrival, we were accosted by the ghost known as Moaning Myrtle. Professor Lockhart stood forth and attempted to intimidate the spirit with his presence. Myrtle seemed unimpressed and chose to draw water from a nearby toilet bowl and douse his fiery presentation.

SS: Bloody prancing fool.

A.: Ahem! At this point Holly stepped forward and spoke briefly to the truculent spirit.

HE: (shouting like a military drill instructor) Miss Henderson! During your recent sentry duties did you observe the passing of a flame-haired trollop?!

A.: The ghost snapped immediately to a military posture and replied that she had seen the suspect enter the lavatory, growl at the ghost and then whisper near one of the sink handles, at which point the ghost had chosen a strategic withdrawal. Holly commended her performance and suggested that Peeves looked lonely and had recently mentioned a desire to learn something called a Waterdance. Moaning Myrtle sped off before anyone else could speak.

SS smirks and shifts his icepack to his forehead.

A.: Holly then led our band to the aforementioned sink spigot, whispered something in what I can only assume was Parseltongue, at which point the sink moved forward and to the side, leaving an opening down into the depths of the castle. After a minute of heated discussion, Holly jumped down the hole, followed by Professors Lockhart and Snape. Holly landed at the bottom of the tube onto a pile of rodent bones that filled the 100 square foot room to two or three feet of accumulated detritus. As Holly and Professor Snape rose to their knees, Professor Lockhart spoke: "This is really disgusting. OBLIViate!"

SS rises suddenly from his chair, letting the icepack drop to the ground as he pulls his wand.

SS: That prancing ponce hit me with THAT? I will end what's left of his miserable existence...

AD: Severus, please!

A.: PROFESSOR SNAPE, I think you'll agree that subsequent events reduce the need for your immediate reprisal. I would suggest you return to your quiet observation, as you may find the details of interest.

SS slumps back into the lounge chair and cleans off the icepack with a flick of his wand.

A.: Where were we? Of course. Professor Lockhart had just thrown his Memory Charm at Holly and Professor Snape. The force of the spell pushed Professor Snape forward to strike his head against the chamber wall, knocking him unconscious. Holly just sat where she was.

HE: Adrian? Why didn't that work on me?

A.: (to HE) Your mind was protected by my presence. Have you made any progress on that foggy memory yet?

HE: Doesn't matter.

A.: (resumes narration) Before I could ask Holly what she meant by that, I could feel her focus her anger, her sense of betrayal, her righteous indignation into a swirling mass of power that she then pushed down her arm...

AD: Great Merlin! Holly used the Cruciatus Curse on Gilderoy?

A.: Heh. No, Albus. Holly didn't torture Lockhart with a Crucio.

AD: Thank Maeve.

A.: Holly was much more direct about it. With Lockhart moving forward to check on an unconscious Severus, he was taken completely by surprise when Holly leapt onto his back pushing them both to the bottom of the ossuary pile. From her position on top of the startled Professor, Holly began pounding her magic-infused fist repeatedly into his face. I could hear the bones of his cheek snap on the first blow. By the 15th strike, his skull had begun to look misshapen.

MM: Oh, my lord.

A.: Holly finally stopped hitting Gilderoy when he choked out from between his last three teeth "Who are you?" Holly's response was appropriately venomous, I thought.

HE: Obliviate that, you motherfucker!

AD: Adrian, I hope...are you sure you're not embellishing in the least?

A.: If anything Albus, my descriptions lack the proper gruesome nuance. Holly's performance evoked the kind of brutality not seen on this isle since the suppression of William Wallace. It reminded me of the heady days I spent accompanying Patrick ap Fierkus on his Geas to drive the serpents from Eire!

MM: You travelled with Saint Patrick?

A.: Godric was only my last mortal owner. Otherwise I would no doubt appear more stylish, wouldn't you think?

SS: And then...?

A.: Holly stepped back from the bloody mass that was once Professor Lockhart's head and checked on your limp form, Professor Snape.

SS: How kind.

A.: ...and found a few things she had been looking for. Holly pocketed a Bezoar and two vials that she guessed were Veritaserum and a Calming Draught.

SS starts checking his robes' pockets

A.: I chose then to see if Holly had calmed enough to engage in conversation.

A.: (to HE) What are your plans now, my dear?



HE: I'm sorting that, Sorting Hat! Give me a moment.

A.: You seem fatigued.

HE: I've never used my fist like that for more than one punch. I'm surprised I'm still standing.

A.: Yet you seem intent on moving forward.

HE: I ...I can't get these two out of here. Ginny is somewhere in there. Even if she doesn't know what she's doing, she's here for a reason. I don't think I can just wait to see what Riddle's next move might be.

A.: I'm surprised you care for her safety.

HE: Reading my mind, Adrian?

A.: I promise as always that your inner secrets will be safe with me. Would you mind if I tell this tale to the appropriate parties when our adventure ends? It may make any actions you take easier to justify to reactive Ministers and such.

HE: (sighs) Better you than me, I suppose. I prefer to avoid...

A.: ...any useless or unwanted talking, I know.

HE: Are you my friend, Adrian?

A.: I would be proud to say so, if you allow it.

A.: (resumes narration) Miss Evans then took me off long enough to press a kiss to my forehead and returned me atop her head.

AD quickly gestures towards SS with a staying hand before SS can speak.

A.: Ahem. Well, I then observed Holly preparing her entry to the inner Chamber. She applied a charm to the lenses of her goggles that turned them into mirrors of a sort then placed the goggles over her eyes with a grin. Holly then pulled a thin silvery cloak from inside her

robes and applied a Silencing charm to it before putting it on, as well. After taking one more calming breath, she moved from the ossuary chamber into a connecting hallway that led to a large room with a massive door, carved in serpent motif. Holly took out her wand and carefully approached the portal. Seeing no obvious handle, she spoke once more in Parseltongue, eventually coercing the hatch to uncurl and allow us to enter.

We entered a stone chamber to rival the size and grandeur of the Great Hall, complete with marble pillars with self-lighting sconces and the back wall formed into a twenty foot tall rendition of Salazar's face. Water had been leaking in from somewhere above as it was gathered in pools wherever the stonework was uneven. It was then I realised that Holly's cloak rendered us invisible. Holly moved forward, skirting the outside of the Chamber to keep to the shadows, lest her footsteps reveal our location. As we approached the upraised dais in front of Salazar's beard, I could see a ritual circle had been scribed onto the stone floor perhaps 12 feet wide, across the edge of which Ginevra Weasley was lain on her side, facing downward.

Holly pulled back the hood of the cloak and reversed it to cancel the invisibility effect. Pushing her goggles to her forehead, she crouched down to examine Miss Weasley with her wand at the ready. Even with this preparation, Holly was caught off guard when the prone girl spun around and grabbed Holly's wand hand, smashing it to the stone floor with a crack. Holly had been flipped to the ground and thus looked up to find Miss Weasley standing over her, Holly's own wand pointed at her face.

Ginny spoke with an evil sneer, her eyes glowing red. "Finally! That girl's legacy wand was weak already and ill suited to either of us! Yours is the instrument I need." Ginny then walked back into the center of the circle to stand above a small book that had been obscured from our view earlier by the young girl's cloak. Holly flipped to a crouch and carefully moved forward, but found her hand burned as it crossed the outer edge of the circle scribed on the ground. "Tut, tut. I'll deal with you presently 'Call me Holly'; I have an important poem to recite. Once I'm finished we can see what fun your underdeveloped body can provide."

Holly curled up into ball, cradling her singed hand and broken wrist gently with her left hand. I could feel her concentrating.

HE: Adrian, we're fucked. She has my wand and I wouldn't know how to break that circle if I had it. I'm able to patch up my wrist, but what else can I do? I think Riddle is going to make her a permanent possession. I've really stuffed up this one. Why can't I think?

A.: (to HE) Allow yourself a moment, Holly. You are a bit young to be expecting to have an answer for every scenario. What I can say is that a ritual circle can be disrupted with ash or salt. Perhaps if you were to gain access to those sconces...

HE: I'm not so young, Hat. Not really.

A.: (resumes narration) What I saw flitting through Holly's mind at this point made me think a Dementor had been set loose in the Chamber. At first, it was a vision of Miss Granger frozen in the hospital wing, then the corpse of our unfortunate Penelope Clearwater, her face frozen in horror. I'm uncertain of the meaning of the next vision, as it was just Holly in a similar fetal position, facing her dormitory window. Further images began passing through her mind, fast enough to be seen and understood, then replaced by another; reading from her journal, listening to a house-elf, being beaten by a fat boy she knew. The next image startled me more than the previous- it was Professor Quirrel screaming Crucio at her, time and again! After that, the images came faster still; that Mountain Troll swinging its tree trunk to smash apart several lavatory stalls, Holly being whipped with a switch, Holly being dropped naked into a bathtub of icy water, having metal clamps touched to her bare back inducing an electrical shock...

AD: Dear God. I thought she was...Oh dear, God.

A.: ...being surrounded by young boys kicking her. Finally the last memory was of being struck aside her head with a cast iron frying pan. Holly burst out in unrestrained crying then. It was the wail of a wounded animal unable to stand it anymore. Holly continued the wail, crying out all her injustices in the middle of the cold stone Chamber where she was certain she would die...

MM: (crying) Adrian, Albus, is this necessary? I mean...

A.: TAKE WITNESS OF YOUR HERO. The moment Miss Weasley turned in laughter to deride Holly's plaintive breakdown, Miss Evans wiped both hands across her face and slapped then down onto the edge of the ritual circle. Immediately her hands began to smoke and burn, but within seconds the circle burst out in light, throwing Holly and I away from the dais to land separately some ten feet distant!

SS: Brilliant!

A.: The red headed girl standing in the center of this quickly fading circle raged in frustration. She then spoke in a clear intonation of summoning, using Parseltongue, then reverted to English; "You fucking bitch! It will take me hours to redraw that, but I'll make sure you don't linger to interfere ever again! Now face the monster of the Chamber, Salazar's familiar, the Basilisk!"

Holly swept up into a crouch and set her protections about her once more. She returned me to her head before setting the cloak to cover us with its disillusionment. Holly then backed away and took a moment to drink the Calming Draught, retrieve the Bezoar and ask for my help.

HE: Ugh, I can't believe I'm going to swallow this thing- it's like a giant turd-sized hairball. Adrian, I have a few moments before that thing gets a bead on us. You wouldn't know where I could get a wand to use, do you?

A.: (to HE) A wand? No, but I believe I may have a weapon suitable to the task.

HE: A weapon? Where...OW!!

A.: (resumes narration) I had expelled Gryffindor's sword from my depths but I had unfortunately not prepared the young witch as it knocked her head in appearing from under my brim. Holly attempted to pick up the sword with some effort. I advised her that if she found it unwieldy, she could touch the gemstone where the hilt met the guard and request an alternate weapon.

HE: Cool. Lightsabre!

A.: The sword then shrunk to the size of a small arming sword with a thrusting point.

HE: How's this supposed to help?

A.: (to HE) It is an ancient artifact; you asked for a light sabre. If I may suggest, perhaps a scimitar or cavalry sabre would be closer to your needs

HE: Um... right. Cavalry Sabre! Ginny's telling the beastie to track us by scent. We'll see about evading it first and circle back. I wish I had my broom...

MM coughs and looks downward somewhat shamefully.

AD: Minerva? Is there something you wanted to add to Adrian's narrative?

MM: Holly's broom is over there- I appropriated it when she and the Weasley twins were caught out of curfew pelting the Slytherins with dungbombs. She had ridden it to escape them when they had surrounded her. It was an appropriate punishment for flying in the halls, only...

AD: Only now you regret hampering her later efforts with your justified actions.

MM: Don't look so smug, Albus. I don't see how you have helped her in any way up to this point.

SS: Children, perhaps we can return to the story and save the finger pointing for when all the facts are available.

AD, MM: Severus!

A.: I concur. While Holly was adjusting to the Sabre, Miss Weasley had retrieved Holly's wand and began casting spells to fill the room

with mist, then projected small snakes to slither constantly on the ground, making for treacherous and poisonous footing. The Basilisk itself slithered from the mouth of Salazar's stone visage, fully 20 yards in length. Its mouth was at least four feet wide, and two pale amber orbs the size of street lanterns sat atop its head, projecting its trademark deadly gaze. Holly noted immediately that the mist seemed to reflect more of the yellowish radiance at times. She theorized that the killing gaze was not constant, but only fully effective on 'high beams' as she put it. The mist was meant to catch us from our magical concealment and would have been effective had we been disillusioned, but Holly's cloak seems to be of another order of effect. We remained visually undetected. After several minutes of evasion, Holly was becoming physically tired, but her spirit seemed somewhat renewed.

HE: Adrian, I can't convince the great snake to give up the chase. I think we need to take out the source.

A.: Do you mean to kill Miss Weasley?

HE: Gladius! Only if I have to. It's not really her doing this, after all. She's taking her cues from Riddle...oh yeah!

A.: (resumes narration) Holly tossed the empty potion bottle across the Chamber to draw her enemies' attention, then stalked back up to the dais where she approached Miss Weasley from behind. As Holly swung the roman short sword at the girl's shoulder, Miss Weasley turned and brought up a shield spell to deflect the blow. Holly switched her grip and knocked a very surprised Miss Weasley in the head with the hilt of the sword, sending her to the ground seemingly unconscious. While her body was unmoving, we could still hear the eerie voice coming from the prone redhead. "Well played, but I will kill you yet, even if this body is damaged beyond repair." The voice switched to Parseltongue and we could hear the Basilisk charging from across the Chamber towards us. Holly swung down at the ground- I thought surely she was going to cleave Miss Weasley in two with the strength of the attack, but her target was two feet closer. The Gladius sliced directly through the binding of the small black diary that lay to the center of the former ritual circle, shredding it into two

halves. A shriek then emanated from the book to rival the one Holly had let out just a few minutes earlier.

Too late perhaps, Holly recognized that she didn't have time to deter the Basilisk's charge. Holly turned the sword towards the beast as it clamped down upon her arm, a venomous fang piercing her muscles, with the sword pinned in place poking out between its teeth on the opposite side of its mouth. Holly slumped to the ground, and then the beast began wrapping its coils around her body, continuing to hold her arm stretched out into its mouth. I could tell Holly was struggling to remain conscious, I can only guess that the Bezoar was preventing her immediate death. I could hear her ribs cracking as the serpent tightened its coils. Darkness closed in within Holly's inner vision. I heard a sudden crack and realised Holly's pelvis had been broken- the sudden rush of pain woke her from death's door. I heard her mumble two words.

AD, SS, and MM all sit at the edge of their seats.

MM: What words, Adrian?

HE: (whispering) p...p...p...pocketknife

[pause]

claymore.

A.: And with that, Godric's sword was projected through the Basilisk's head. From my viewpoint, the world tilted as the dying serpent cracked several more of Holly's bones in its death throes. Lying there, I could hear Miss Weasley suddenly gasp awake. She murmured a tremulous "H-Holly? Oh Merlin!" and then emptied her stomach and passed out again. We all lay there in the Chamber for a few minutes before I could hear and see Fawkes appearing in a flash of fire above us.

As I understand it, Fawkes has yet to leave Holly's side since transporting us to the care of Madame Pomfrey.

AD: You are correct. Fawkes has been weeping upon Holly's considerable wounds all morning. I don't think it actually helps any more after the first few drops, but Fawkes is quite upset.

A.: Now, Severus. Is Holly Evans your hero?

Transcription ends.

Like Minerva couldn't have left the Quill running a little longer.

Yeah, that's about what happened. I must have emptied Poppy's supply of Skele-Gro as I seem to be able to move all my limbs in the normal directions. I just feel so weak right now. Yay, I won. Yet there's Hermione, still frozen like a statue for another month before the Mandrake draught will be ready. I can't tell yet if it was worth it. But, I killed something back again. I liberated a sword, though I don't see it around here anywhere. And Ginny is back to normal, maybe. Hedwig and Fawkes are keeping each other company at the foot of my bed. I don't think they're involved- it's more like neighbors discussing childcare. I can almost tell what they're saying.

I'm still too tired. I'll write more later.

Holly



## Chapter 13: I Feel Sick

1st May, 1993

Dear Harry,

I am starting to feel a little better. For the last few days I have been awake, it has felt like my whole body was being rebuilt. If you listen closely at my stomach, you can hear little construction workers making rude remarks as the bread in my broth floats through. Madame Pomfrey has been at once pleased and concerned. From her perspective, I shouldn't have been conscious for another month, but now that I am awake and itching to be mobile, she doesn't understand why I still feel sick. I think she appreciates my trust in her opinion, as she also seems grateful that I decided to stay in hospital these last three days. In truth, up until today there was nowhere I'd rather be. Hedwig is here, Hermione is here, and the rest of the world is out there. Given my experience, what would you choose?

Still, I am itching to move and I've noticed that my only possessions at hand here are this journal and the Quill. There's no sign of my clothes, cloak, goggles or wand. And of course, the Sword is absent. I can understand most of it, but I have never been far from my wand while in hospital before. It makes me think they are keeping all the sharp objects away from me. I asked Madame Pomfrey, and she said the Headmaster collected them up after she and Fawkes were finally able to uncoil the dead Basilisk from around my body. Looking back over the transcription Prof McG left for me, I can only assume that Fawkes can teleport others within his grip, and brought me here still wrapped in the serpent to avoid delays in treatment. Come to think of it, I doubt Fawkes could have pried apart those coils with only his beak and talons anyway.

I think it's time for me to see the Headmaster again. I just wish I didn't already have a headache.

Transcription: 1st May, 1993 starting 2:38 PM GMT

Holly Evans (HE) pokes her head into the Headmaster's office. Seeing no one else around, HE steps in and sits down in the chair in

front of the desk. Adrian the Sorting Hat (A.) is resting on a wig stand on the bookshelf behind the desk.

A.: Miss Holly Evans! It is most agreeable to see you walking about once more! And might I add, you are looking most radiant!

HE: Hiya, Hat. Yeah, hospital gown and two wool blankets is the fashion statement of the season.

A.: Aren't your feet cold?

HE: Only sometimes, but I hadn't noticed until you said something.

HE curls her bare feet beneath her blankets, wrapping more tightly into the chair.

HE: Adrian, thank you for telling my story as well as you did.

A.: Ah! So you've heard a rendition of it then?

HE: Prof McG recorded it for me, so I read the transcription. I didn't realise you could mimic voices.

A.: Normally I cannot. Only the thoughts you sent to me as conversation could be rendered thus. It is but a parlor trick, but excellent for storytelling. I cannot say when I should have the opportunity to use it once more.

HE: Yeah, I kinda doubt the Headmaster is going to lend you out the next time I need to kill something. Perhaps you should see about getting involved in teaching. Professor Flitwick's choir could probably use a voice coach carrying a thousand years of experience, not to mention a decent Baritone.

A.: Hah! An excellent suggestion! Shall I ask Albus?

Albus Dumbledore (AD) enters the room from the door to his private chambers. He stops to look at HE in his guest chair.

AD: Miss Evans! I am pleased to see you on the road of recovery. Did the gargoyle at the entrance give you much trouble?

HE: Well, you changed passwords since my last visit, but he stepped aside after I threatened him in Parseltongue. May I have my stuff back please?

AD: I am fine as well, Miss Evans. Thank you for asking.

HE: I said, 'Please'.

A.: She did say 'Please', Albus.

AD turns to give a look to A. and then pulls out a carved dark wooden box from under the desk. AD removes the cover from the box and sits down behind the desk.

AD: Your goggles, wand and robes are within, as well as an extraordinary cloak. You may keep the box, if you like.

HE: Thanks. Is the other vial still in my robes?

AD: Severus' potion was returned to him. He has indicated to me that he will not hold you responsible for stealing from him, seeing how the items were used appropriately and in the defense of the school. It is good that you have come to speak with me today, as it is matters of responsibility I would like to discuss with you...

HE: Hang on. What about that?

HE points to the broadsword now mounted on the wall next to the bookshelf behind the desk.

AD: That is the Sword of Godric Gryffindor himself. The Sorting Hat was able to provide you with this weapon after you demonstrated such remarkable courage. It is enchanted to be released from Adrian's care to the hand of a person who needs it, but only a person worthy to be called a Gryffindor.

HE: I know what I did, and the only reason the Hat gave it to me is I asked for a weapon. If I hadn't requested for him to tag along, he wouldn't have been there to note my courage or give me the sword.

AD: Nonetheless, it is a school artifact. It shall remain with the school until it is needed once more.

HE: Fine, whatever. How much is my share?

AD: Share?

HE: Yes, share. I killed a 20 meter long Basilisk, which was transported up to the hospital wing wrapped around my crushed body. I doubt you just cast 'Evanescio'. I bumped into the twins on the way here, and they said that Professor Snape has been holed up in his private lab for the last month, having Slytherin prefects proctor his classes. He must be rendering the corpse for materials. So what's my cut?

AD: What else did the Messer's Weasley say to you, my dear?

HE shifts position in the chair, still keeping herself wrapped tightly. HE's face is very pale.

HE: They said both Lockhart and Ginny were transferred to St. Mungo's, but Ginny is back now. They know I was nearly dead upon arrival and that the school was in an uproar trying to find out why no one was allowed into hospital for the last few weeks. Poppy has been making dorm visits instead. They said you appeared at the evening feast to announce that Slytherin's monster was a Basilisk that had been slain, but that the investigation was still ongoing. They also said that Professor Snape had let it slip that I had ruined Lockhart's chances for winning Witch Weekly's brightest smile award ever again, but that his teaching skills would be undiminished. "Kinda the pot calling the kettle black on that one." George said.

AD: How did you know it was George Weasley?

HE: When they're together, Fred always talks first. You just need to keep track after that.

AD: Really? You know, I always find our conversations so stimulating, Holly.

HE: You're freaking me out again, sir.

Lucius Malfoy (LM) bursts into the office, followed closely by Dobby, a house-elf (Db). HE looks up at the new arrivals from her chair. LM stands staring at AD and does not take notice of the occupied chair.

LM: Dumbledore! What is the meaning of this? You were suspended from your position by the Board of Governors!

AD: Indeed I was, leaving Professor McGonagall to assume the mantle of Acting Headmistress. It was under that authority that she contracted me to return to the castle and investigate the threat of Slytherin's monster and the Chamber of Secrets. Minerva asked me to work here to keep out of everyone's way, as she prefers her current office.

LM: (coolly) Very well. What has your investigation uncovered? I will take your report back to the Governors to decide if your services will continue to be needed in this matter.

AD: Oh, I doubt you will need me to continue the investigation after today. I was just interviewing a key witness that should wrap things up quite nicely.

AD gestures towards HE in the guest chair. LM turns to suddenly notice they are not alone. LM sneers.

LM: And who is this? She looks familiar but the hair is a little dark to be a Weasley.

HE looks confused, and then pulls a lock of her hair in front of her face.

HE: Bloody grief! I've gone burgundy!

LM: One of your best students, I suppose...

HE: No wonder Fred said they never felt closer to me. Is that what you meant by 'radiant', Adrian?

A.: Exactly that, my dear.

LM: Enough of this prattle! Dumbledore, what have you uncovered?

AD conjures forth a stuffed chair for LM at the side of the desk. LM sits down primly at the edge of the seat with his walking cane propped before him, facing Dumbledore.

AD: Well, if you recall, we first became aware of the threat against the school this past Halloween when our caretaker's cat Mrs. Filch was petrified and a message was written on the wall beside her frozen form, indicating that the Heir of Slytherin had returned to open the Chamber of Secrets and use the monster within to punish the Heir's enemies.

LM: Muggleborns...

AD: One can only guess whom the Heir may have targeted. Subsequent attacks resulted in the petrification of students Justin Finch-Fletchley, Colin Creevey and Hermione Granger. It was at the point when Miss Granger was petrified that the Monster claimed its first kill in fifty years- Penelope Clearwater. At that point, the Minister of Magic came to the castle and arrested our gamekeeper Rubeus Hagrid, on the grounds that he was involved in the trouble when last the Chamber was opened, resulting in the death of Myrtle Henderson. I believe Cornelius said "we must appear to be doing something!" It was at that time that you brought your injunction against my continuing as Headmaster here, on the basis that I had proven I could not protect the students.

LM: I note all the victims were muggleborns after all.

HE: The Headmaster failed to mention Sir Nicholas, the Gryffindor ghost. Surely you wouldn't classify him as muggleborn?

LM: Please remind your student that children are to speak only when spoken to, Headmaster.

AD: Miss Evans has a point Lucius...

LM: Miss Evans? This is Holly Evans, the girl who brought the troll into the school? The one that flew a magically tainted muggle auto across Britain after missing the Express? The one that physically attacked a student before Christmas, then as recently as three weeks ago did the same to a teacher, sending poor Gilderoy Lockhart to the long term care ward at St. Mungo's? The one that attacked my son last summer? This is your star witness?

LM points at HE with his cane. HE scowls and tightens the blankets around her once more.

HE: Forgive me if I don't shake hands.

AD: Lucius, you shouldn't believe everything you read in the Prophet. Miss Evans was not responsible for bringing the troll into the school, that was Professor Quirrel...

LM: Another of your stellar hiring choices.

HE: And Pansy attacked me. I just defended myself really, really well.

HE smiles.

LM turns to sneer down his nose at HE.

LM: And what did Professor Lockhart do to deserve your animalistic tantrum?

HE looks up to stare into LM's eyes.

HE: Professor Lockhart attempted to Oblivate me and Professor Snape.

LM: That's your story...

A.: Actually, that is my rendition of the facts, Lord Malfoy. Gilderoy Lockhart cast an Obliviation upon Severus and Miss Evans, but hadn't realised that my presence prevented his spell from taking hold on her mind. Holly used the tools at hand to defend herself and a faculty member against a person illegally using Mind magics.

LM: Indeed, and what brought Miss Evans into the situation in the first place?

AD: Therein lies the tale. You see...

HE: (sigh) Let's speed this along shall we? The monster was a Basilisk. It was released by a student who was being possessed by Voldemort through his diary. Voldemort was possessing this student to enable him to fully overcome her body and return to action, and make everyone's life horrible. The Basilisk is dead, the diary has been cut to pieces, and the only reason I haven't killed you for it is I'm too tired from being poisoned and nearly crushed to death!

LM: What?! What is this nonsense?! And why should you want to kill me for any of it?

HE: Because you're the motherfucker that gave Ginny the diary.

LM: Albus, control your student!

AD: Perhaps we should all restrict ourselves to the facts.

LM: Indeed. So you believe Miss Weasley was possessed by a dark object carrying the taint of the Dark Lord. Is she under restraints?

AD: Miss Weasley was treated at St. Mungo's and released. She is being monitored daily by our healer Madame Pomfrey.

HE: And since the Weasleys have no access to dark objects, she must have come by it when you fought with their family over the summer at the bookshop.

LM: You have no proof of that.



HE: No, but I have a witness. Dobby came to me before the fight to warn me not to come here, saying his family was bringing dark things to Hogwarts.

Db: Nooooooooooooo!

HE: He also knew about the Chamber and that the monster within yet lived!

LM swiftly spins out of the chair, drawing a wand from his walking stick. AD stands as well and aims his wand at LM. LM stops with his wand pointed at Db's head. The house-elf crouches, trembling in fear.

AD: Take care, Lucius. Nothing done in this office today has been illegal, yet.

LM: Fine. Dobby, you are dismissed. You shall bear the mark of the betrayer!

A quick flash jets from LM's wand to burn a Greek letter 'Phi' onto Dobby's cheek.

Db: Dobby is sorry! (begins weeping)

LM tosses a glove at Db's face.

LM: Do me the favor of dying quickly. (addressing AD) I believe our business here is done, Dumbledore.

AD: Then I shall expect you to rescind your injunction against me, as the school has obviously been returned to relative safety.

LM: (Grumbles) Yes!

AD: And I should think you might give up your governorship at Hogwarts. It would be quite the scandal should details of these events make it to the ears of the Board, much less the public.

HE: Hang on; shouldn't he be brought to trial?

LM: With a soon-dead dishonored house elf as your witness? Be grateful of the concessions you've already won.

HE: Soon-dead?

AD: Dobby will never get work from a family carrying that mark, and without a family to bind him, Dobby will waste away and die, probably within the week.

Db crumbles to the ground in quiet sobs.

HE: Dobby, you're hired.

LM: Foolish little girl! You can't bind an elf to you. You'd have to be the leader of a recognized family and own land free of debt...

Db jumps up in surprise, turns to HE and nods enthusiastically.

Db: Dobby accepts!

AD, LM: What?!

LM brings his wand to bear on Db once more.

HE: (quickly) Dobby, find me some fresh fruit!

Db disappears with a crack. LM turns his wand back to HE.

LM: YOU!

HE: You want a banana?

AD: Lucius! I will not warn you again. Do not threaten my students.

LM sheathes his wand back into his cane, then turns sharply and leaves.

HE slumps back into her chair. AD does the same.

AD: I'm glad we could work together to preserve the sanctity of our school, Holly. Lucius Malfoy is a dangerous opponent. I believe he was seeking to replace the current faculty with his own candidates in order to change the nature of this school. I doubt you or your friend Hermione would be welcome in his Hogwarts, if you catch my meaning.

HE: You don't think he wanted Voldemort to return?

AD: Why would you think that?

HE: He didn't flinch when I said Voldemort, and called him the Dark Lord. Besides, I'm not sure how welcome we are now. Ask Hermione how safe she feels here, once she's been un-petrified.

AD: Perhaps that is enough excitement for one day.

HE: Mmm, not quite. We still haven't resolved the details of my share from the Basilisk.

AD sighs.

AD: I would like to offer you the Award for Special Services to the school. It comes with a full scholarship and a supplies stipend. We can make the announcement at the end of year feast...

HE: Just like Tom Riddle? I don't think so.

AD: I think you are being a bit childish about this.

HE: Fine, give me the award and the allowance, but no ceremony.

HE stands up from the chair and retrieves her belongings from the box, wrapping her robes over her layers of blankets and hospital gown. Once her goggles are in place, she points her wand at the wall behind AD.

HE: Accio sword.

The Sword of Gryffindor is pulled from the wall. HE catches it in her off hand.

HE: Potions knife.

AD: What do you think you are doing?

HE: (sheathes knife in her belt) I will bear the sword. I seem to get in more trouble than most. You said Adrian could call it forth when it was needed to the hand of a person worthy to be called Gryffindor. I'll take care of it meanwhile.

AD: So now you wish to barter for a school artifact? That's hardly a Gryffindor attitude. Professor McGonagall will be quite ashamed of you.

HE: I will stop arguing with you about the unbridled fortune you are attempting to steal from me, if you do three things. First, I'd like a vow that you will stay out of my head from now on. No compulsions, no mind reading, just stay out. Second, split the money between the school and the Salazar fund for indigent muggleborns; invent it if you were lying about it before. Give ten percent to Professor Snape for his rendering efforts. Third, make sure Hagrid is cleared of all charges, both old and new. He's been stewing in prison for a month.

AD: And what would you have me tell the public about your victory over the Basilisk?

HE: (sighs) Tell them Harry did it. Harry killed the beast and Harry has the sword. Maybe you'll bring him out of isolation with the world clamoring for his celebrity-ness to show himself. If you want to do me a favor, let me meet my brother! Now give me your vow and let me out of here, I feel sick.

AD: I solemnly vow not to cast a mind-affecting spell upon Holly Evans until I have her express consent. So mote it be!

[pause]

HE: Yeah, alright. So mote it be.

A swirl of magic leaps from the Headmaster's wand to touch both HE and AD. Db reappears with a pop carrying a yellow gourd.

Db: Mango?

Transcription ends.

After that circus, I stopped by Prof McG's office. She was in, and nearly begged to give me my broom back. I assured her I had almost no hard feelings toward her about not having the broom when I faced the serpent. I lived, after all. And got a free hair coloring.

Dobby has taken to following me around. I haven't resolved what to do about him yet. For one thing, he lost his pillowcase when Lucius banished him, so the poor guy has been wrapped in one of my ill-sewn corduroy skirts of late. I keep trying not to look when he stumbles arse over teakettle to expose his action-figure sized elf-parts. Dobby defines pathetic in so many ways, but his heart is good. Also, Prof McG informed me that personal house-elves weren't permitted to students during the school year, one of the few concessions to level the playing field between nobles and commoners in attendance. Figures. I'll have him work in the kitchens here until I can think of something better.

I have been going over the transcript and I realised a few mistakes I made with Dumbledore's vow. I forgot to include Hermione, and I didn't make him remove any existing spells he may have used on my mind. Also, if I reread his vow correctly, it will only last until I ask him to use any mind-affecting spell on me, then his shackles come off. Obviously I'm still sick, or I would've made out better.

Holly

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9th May, 1993

Dear Harry,

Just a quick note. I have been absolved of my end of year testing responsibilities and am spending most of my time learning healing from Madame Pomfrey. She felt 'I would do well to make myself useful if I was going to be lurking in her work area until Miss Granger recovers.' I'll give you some highlights.

Tergeo is used for gently cleansing contaminants from soft tissues. Also good on spilled ink.

Scourgify is used to sandblast tenacious things away from resilient objects. I get frequent practice using this on bird droppings.

Evanescio is used to erase the unwanted from this existence, and is usually only effective on soft materials and fluids. High power requirements, leaves no greasy residue.

Episkey is a Greek spell use to reknit tissues together.

Anapneo is another Greek spell, which forces the recipient to unblock their airway and draw breath.

Ferula is used to create a bandage and splint and wrap them around a target limb.

Torpeo is the Numbing Charm, used before almost any procedure to prevent undue suffering.

See if you can find three tactical uses for each spell. Madame Pomfrey is already horrified at my progress. Yes, I'm feeling much better.

Holly

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Transcription: 25th May, 1993 starting 10:13 PM GMT

Holly Evans (HE) is curled up in a canopy bed. The curtains are drawn. Quill is writing in journal on a pillow at the foot of the bed.

HE: I'm dealing with a lot of pain here, so I figured...

HE grunts in pain.

HE: ...I figured I would... (uhhhnnn)...relieve the need to write in the journal now. I could use the respite from blocking the Compulsion. Hang on...

S-Silencio-aghhk

Oh Shit!

The bed curtains burst into flame.

HE: Aguamenti! Reparo!

The curtains are dowsed with water, and then repaired to their original state.

HE: One...more...time, then. Silencio. Better. I thought I was done with being sick, but in the last few hours, my insides feel like they are recreating the Gordian Knot. I read that menstrual cramps were painful, but this....

[pause]

Yeeaaagh! (gasp)

...this is more like steak knives are being used to carve my intestines like a pumpkin, from the inside.

[pause]

After a while, the pain passes. I barely made it through classes today. Prof McG kept staring at me with concern, but I muddled through. I decided to return to classes after Madame Pomfrey chased me out of the hospital wing for using an Episkey to seal Lavender's mouth shut. It's a healing transformation, so we couldn't just cancel it with a Finite-Poppy had to cut her mouth back open and resculpt her lips into shape. Honestly, I think most of the Gryffindor table was grateful for

the three days of relative silence during her convalescence. I know I was.

[pause]

I may as well catch you up on events. The Mandrake draught will finally be ready in five days. I asked Professor Sprout several times if there was a way to accelerate their maturity. She eventually indicated that there was a formula called an Incubation Bath, but that it would compromise the reliability of the Mandrakes to cure our patients. I hate to wait, but I wouldn't want to risk Hermione not being cured. I did find the formula for the Incubation bath in Moste Potente Potions, though. I suppose I should return that before Madame Pince starts to garnish the wages of Hermione's grandchildren to pay for the late fees.

Hermione will be beside herself anyway. We submitted our electives for next year and I filled out her form by checking every available option. It's just a little prank between friends, and I plan to tease her about having enough to study as she catches up with half her second year being stuck in hospital. I have no doubt she'll do fine. We were already bored with our first term homework being done when Filch's cat was petrified. If we hadn't had this mystery to solve, Hermione might have jumped a year on me, and then where would I be? No, I think it's best we arrange plenty of research tangents for Miss Granger.

HE spasms and curls into a tight ball as pain resurges.

HE: AARRRrrrrrrrgghh. Oh, Hermione. I think your guardian angels are kicking my ass for saying that just now. I wouldn't blame them. I just miss you so much. It helps to have something about you to occupy my thoughts, especially now.

[pause]

Sorry, Harry. I just remembered you'll be reading this. Not her.

[pause]



Ok, back to events. Hagrid was released from the wizarding prison, some awful rock on the North Sea called Azkaban. I went to visit him, but he didn't have much to say. He just keeps staring into his hearth, looking like his dog had been killed. I decided to see if his friend the Giant Spider might cheer him up. On my way out to the Forbidden Forest, Ron stopped me to say he was grateful that Ginny had been saved and that I was recovering. Then he promised to defend me, to stand by my side if ever there was trouble. I thanked him and said I was going to see Aragog, the giant Acromantula in the Forest. He slapped my back and said he wished me well and to meet him up at dinner later.

HE smiles.

HE: Finding the spiders in the forest wasn't too hard. It seems they've found out the Basilisk is dead, so there are steady streams of spiders marching a line back to the castle. I followed the trail back towards the source. Even in the light of a bright, sunny Saturday afternoon, the Forbidden Forest is so dense, you need to cast a torch to see well, unless you have goggles like mine. I was able to wend my way deep into the forest until I reached the nest of the Acromantula colony. The spiders there were approaching wolf-size, so I was very careful to keep track of them as I moved forward, but they all kept a distance of five or six meters. Still, I kept my wand in one hand and Godric's blade in the other. I need a scabbard for these things, y'know?

Anyway, I walked forward to finally meet Aragog. He had a deep rumbling voice, appropriate to his size, as his legs spread out to stretch the length of the Dursley's house. We talked for a bit. I introduced myself and asked if maybe he could think of how to cheer up Hagrid. He told me four important things, and then I had to fly off, because his troops were hungry. He said he wasn't well enough to travel, which Hagrid should know. He said I smelled of their ancient enemy, which confused them and is why I hadn't been attacked yet. He said that Hagrid had been subjected to Dementors while at Azkaban, and that they dredge up the most horrible memories a person has, to make them relive them and feed off the emotions. And the last thing that Aragog said was that the last Centaur that they couldn't eat was looking for me. It may have been a lie to make me drop my guard, because that was when his 'children' started dropping

at me from the trees. This is where the scabbard need comes to mind. I had to drop Godric's blade to grab my shrunken broom and hit it with the Finite from my wand, then stuff my wand back in my robes to grab the sword again to lift off on the broom. Maybe I'll learn to juggle this summer...

HE cries out in pain and wraps her arms around her lower torso, thrashing about on the bed.

HE: Oh God, the pain is worse than anything...it's like that fucking snake is breaking my pelvis, all over aggh! Agghh! AAAAAAAHHHHH!

[pause]

Ohhhooooooooohh.

That's a relief.

I think I just had my first menses, only...oh God, there's...

I...

[pause]

I just...

[pause]

I just dropped three black slimy eggs into my knickers.

(sniffs)

I am a freak.

HE begins to cry as she reaches for the Quill.

Transcription ends.

Author's Note: These are some acknowledgments for ideas I picked up from elsewhere. I'll add more as the ideas are used. Thanks to every one of these authors!

Agnostics Puppet and Silver Aegis for my first exposure to the Girl-Who-Lived idea

Darth Cious for reminding me of Starman Jack Knight's combat goggles, and DC comics author James Robinson for creating Jack Knight in the first place

Seel'vor's 'HP and the Quantum Leap' for the most intelligent Hedwig I've seen, including the ones turned into a human. His Hedwig wandered into my story with much welcome

canoncansodoff for the Ayurvedic stuff from 'Alternative Medicine'

Draco664 on fanficaauthors for Hermione getting sexually excited when Harry uses his brain, from 'Journeyman Potter'

cloneserpents for 'A Tale of One Kitty...' and plenty of other pervy ideas from 'HP and the Sword of Gryffindor'

Clell65619 for "Pyjamas the Terror" in 'HP and the Power He has Not', and being a dedicated reviewer and excellent inspiration from all his stories. Read 'Merlin's Reaper'; it proves his ideas are as good as mine and that he's a better writer.

## Chapter 14: Mutatis Mutandis

28th May, 1993

Mr. Harry Potter,

You are a COWARD! I can't bring myself to completely hate you, but you are a coward, or Dumbledore is, or both of you are. I've said before I'd rather put my poison on the page than poison the people who may deserve it, so you're going to get the ink. You have read about my moments of triumph, and the times when I have felt most vulnerable, yet you still remain holed up in whatever stinking palace they have caged you in, and have me pouring my heart out to you like confession in church, with about as much response. Well, you are not God, sir, and I feel no grace.

I cannot just stop my communication, as Minerva's Compulsion keeps us connected. I have resolved instead, that you get the full accounting of my descent into horror and madness. I am becoming a Thing, and you will be witness to all the nuances of that mutation. I just hope Minerva Compelled you to read every word I write at least five times, to make sure it sticks.

As I mentioned, I was lying on the bed in excruciating pain when I expelled three black slimy eggs. If you are not up on girl-plumbing issues, this is NOT NORMAL. Normally, a girl's body induces an unfertilized egg past its prime to tear itself away from her inner uterine walls, carried along by a layer of skin from there, and expels the material in a mixture of blood, goo and occasionally a bit of whole tissue. In my case, I released three eggs the size of flattened cherry tomatoes, in a mixture of slime and dark blood that seems to have a caustic effect on fabric. My knickers were the first to melt away, then the bedspread, the edges of my skirt, parts of the mattress and the gloves I used to pick up the little dears. This caustic fluid doesn't seem to be affecting me, beyond a desire to keep more distant from people than I already do. Thankfully, my existing habits make this virtually unnoticeable. I moved the eggs to a ceramic bowl filled with warm water, which has become my only companion here as I lay in bed for the last three days. Parvati came to retrieve me yesterday after I failed once again to attend classes, but left me be when I threatened to make her lips match Lavender's. I have kept Hedwig

away, in case my touch has become corrosive. I believe she is still holding vigil over Hermione's bed.

My current theory is that I was infused with Basilisk venom and Phoenix tears, then forced to rebuild my body over the following month under the care of Poppy's best spells and potions. This unusual variety of influences coupled with my own magic's healing talent kick-started my menarche, integrating the non-human parts into my womanly cycle. I am a woman now, even if my children will come out as ashwinders (it's a fire snake, look it up).

The eggs grew to about twice their original size, then hardened into swirly grey stones this morning. I think they may hatch or rot soon. I don't know enough about birds, snakes, Phoenixes, Basilisks or anything else that might be going on here to guess what happens next. If they hatch, I'll name them after you. Especially if I have to kill them.

Holly

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29th May, 1993

Harry,

Please forgive my harsh words from earlier. I don't think you have any more influence over your life than I do over mine, maybe even less. Still, somebody will be cowering in my presence soon if things don't change for us. This I swear.

Harry, the eggs are gone. I binned them when I realised they were just going to rot. I've spent the last two hours naked in the corner of the shower, crying over three little parasites that my body rejected.

That's not right. Maybe this is beyond your ability to understand, but I am devastated. I may never have children! This change in my fundamental makeup means that I have no where to turn for guidance. Poppy Pomfrey is the closest I could think of that might understand this, but I just spent the last few weeks taking her Healing arts and

twisting them to use in combat situations. I can't imagine she'll have much sympathy for me. As a second concern, she operates under the Headmaster's authority, so I can't be assured that telling her wouldn't lead to ...all sorts of awful consequences. Minerva would be the second best option, but my trust in her has been fractured for some time, due to the very enchantments that keep me writing in this journal. That leaves me with Hermione, who doesn't have volumes of experience with developing into a woman even if she is my preferred source of understanding and insight. Also, Hermione has been out of commission for two months now, and barely had a handle on the situation as it stood then, owing to her lingering transfiguration into a cat girl. Still, that may prove an advantage- she already knows what it is like to face the idea that you are no longer normal, at a biological level. If nothing else, I am hoping that Hermione's return to free movement will help me to break my melancholy. Either that or the four pounds of chocolate that Dobby liberated from somewhere in the castle. He said the other elves let him work, but treat him like a criminal. I told him he and I were well suited.

It's good chocolate.

Maybe I'll get dressed.

Holly

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2nd June, 1993

Harry,

OK, first of all, I'm feeling more than a little ...hormonal of late, so don't take all my threats as actual intentions to end your life. I have reason to be upset, but the bile behind it may be over-applied.

Originally I was going to transcribe my reunion with Hermione, but I thought back over it and we just ended up hugging and crying for a while, though she was surprised and delighted by my new hair color, and slightly distressed that I was wearing some of her clothing, until I explained that Dobby was wearing my last intact skirt as a toga. So

transcribing that seems a little pointless. Then, I was going to use the Quill again today when I convinced Hermione that telling her everything that had gone on would take too long and I would probably miss important details, so we should have her try Legilimency on me. As you might guess she jumped at the chance to try new magic, but the Quill can't tell you what we experienced so I'm going to give it a go.

Once Poppy had cleared Hermione to leave we had returned to our dorm, so we set up to try the Legilimens on Hermione's canopied bed with several extra pillows for comfort.

We had a few false starts. Hermione was making the same mistake I did in trying to keep my eyes open after the connection was made, but in her case she would break the spell as her eyes closed. It took us another ten tries before I convinced her that I wanted her to be in my brain. There is absolutely an element of willpower here; you need to take an invader's perspective to make the spell work. I had that attitude when I entered Hedwig's mind, though it was a polite invasion. Hermione's frustration was mounting until I told her to calm down and then led her through 'finding her motivation'. I read a book on acting techniques when I was nine and trying to find a way to deal with people teasing me all the time at Dudley's prompting. The whole concept of masks made so much sense that I devoured the concept. It might be why Occlumency has been a cakewalk for me compared to Hermione's experience, aside from the cat-brain problem.

Anyway, I finally got Hermione to enter my mind by appealing to her love of mysteries.

"Hermione, don't you want to know what happened?"

"Of course, but couldn't you just tell me? I'm certain there are things you wouldn't want me to see..."

"Is that it? Hermione, I will be serving up the memories to you. All you have to do is enter the theatre, as it were. Just imagine it; all the secrets and truths are surrounding you, but you can't get to them. You're trapped behind a door to the room where all the secrets are laid out. You can't learn more because you aren't letting yourself into

the room. You have permission, but you're too afraid to look for some reason. The passcode to the door is 'Legilimens'."

I grabbed her arms and stared right into her eyes.

"Don't you want to know?"

I could see her eyes swirl into a kind of mad fervor- I'm going to call this her Mad Seeker "I want to know!" gaze. When I released her arms her wand snapped up to point at my face and she whispered Legilimens with an almost pleading tone. I immediately had to apply a bit of Occlumency, not to keep her out but to force my thoughts away from how turned on I was at that moment. I could feel her in my head only as a kind of background hum that seemed to come from above, yet everywhere. As we sat in this state getting used to the strange change in perception, I visualized her presence as a sort of floating blot of buzz, sort of like floaters in your eyes, only auditory instead of visual. I don't know if this really explains it well, but that's the best I can come up with.

"Now slowly close your eyes but keep the connection going. Don't let your wand drop."

She didn't say anything, so I figured I should keep going. "If you want me to show something you'll have to speak- I can't hear your thoughts or anything."

"Oh, well what I was thinking at you was that this is fantastic. Did you feel like this with Hedwig? How long did the experience last? Could you choose what to see? How did you know when to leave? How..."

"Hermione, let's make a deal- Show now, Tell later. You're making me think of too many things for me to serve up a proper memory."

"I'll say! How can you find anything in here?"

"Shush, chatty monkey!"

"What did you call me?"



"Shush!"

I think she finally caught on because I could sense she had seen the vision in my head of Curious George hopping about with bushy hair and a never-ending babble of chirping coming from his mouth. Once I had found my center again, I brought up the memory of writing beside her bed in hospital when she was petrified, despondent over how lost and alone I felt. It was necessary to show her how things came together in my head, but I also wanted to give her something to think about, as that was the point when I realised that I loved her. Once that had played through, I moved on to my coming back to awareness in the Headmasters office while the Professors were arguing. As the internal conversation with Adrian was spilling out, I heard her gasp.

"What, you think I shouldn't have cursed to Adrian? It's like I said- no decency filters for visitors in my brain."

"Well, no you shouldn't, but I just realised I can see the foggy memory floating near where this is playing. Do you want me to see if I can, I don't know, un-fog it?"

"Yes, but not this time. It really isn't a pressing matter."

"But Holly..."

"Always with the next level with you. Yes, we'll stretch our capabilities to attempt Perenelle's secret memory unlocking techniques, but today just get used to the experience, alright?"

"Okay..."

I proceeded to play out the rest of the conversation and travelling to Myrtle's bathroom. Hermione giggled when she saw how I handled our ghostly friend, but stopped because she could sense the change in the tone of the memories coming up. Hermione wasn't handling it well when I showed her how Lockhart was taken out, and she started to protest as I came to the point where Ginny had my wand.

"Holly, your plan is extraordinary, but you don't need to show me... Holly, don't show me...Holly! Oh, God, Holly how could you...How could they...? Holly, stop! Stop! Holly! HOLLY let me go!"

Around the point Vernon was trying to drown me in ice water I finally stopped showing her the vision and I could feel her presence leave my mind. When I opened my eyes, Hermione was weeping. Her wand was hanging limply in the hand that she held to her eyes as if to catch the tears or block her vision, I couldn't say which. I was ashamed; I know what others may think of me, but I wanted Hermione to know why I am this way, and how important she is to me that I could let her inside my defenses like this. That's what I wanted to say, but instead I said "You could have stopped any time, Hermione. Just lower your wand to break the connection."

Hermione sobbed loudly and looked past her wrist to catch my guilty expression. Hermione then launched herself at me to hold my head in a bear strength crush.

"Oh, God. Holly. I ...haven't the words."

"Breathing ...becoming an issue."

Hermione adjusted her hug so that we could hold each other. I broke down crying again a minute later and we just stayed like that the rest of the afternoon.

After supper, Hermione asked me if I would be OK to continue the memory sharing. She asked very tentatively, but I could see a little of that same 'I want to know!' madness behind it now. We arranged to bring up a pitcher of juice and some glasses and started back again. It only took two tries for Hermione to get in this time, and I resumed the memory where I took my tears and used them to break Gin-Tom's ritual circle. We glided through the rest of the battle- Hermione this time seemed to be exerting a clinical detachment to her observing, so when the Basilisk was done in and my memory faded as I lost consciousness to the pain, she merely asked "Can you show me the conversation with the Headmaster, now?" That being said, once the memories had all played out she exited my mind and sat thoughtfully for a moment, then looked up into my eyes and grabbed me into

another tearful hug, though we lay stretched out on her bedspread in the embrace after the first minute.

We fell asleep in her bed like that. Babies don't sleep as well as I did that night.

Holly

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Harry,

Emotional experiences aside, what I was hoping for from Hermione after our Legilimency experiment was her unusually keen insight. Thankfully Hermione came through like a trooper.

Transcription: 5th June, 1993 starting 7:48 PM GMT

Holly Evans (HE) sits upon her bed, watching Hermione Granger (HG) pace around their dorm room.

HG: I understand what you're saying about the strong magical influences of both the Basilisk and Phoenixes, but they shouldn't have had a lingering effect. The venom and tears should have just cancelled each other out- like an acid and base. Of course, acids and bases can result in inert fluids and poisonous gasses, but that was just an analogy. Unless...

[pause]

HE: (wryly) I'd love it if I could hear you think...

HG: Don't distract me. Obviously there was another factor, a third influence as strong as the first two, something to catalyse... Oooohhhh, I've GOT IT!

HG starts jumping up and down in gleeful excitement. HE gets up and starts jumping in time with her, holding HG's arms in her hands to keep their eyes matched.

HE: So ...What's ...The ...Big ...Rev ...-elation?

HG: You ...Were ...Infused ... With ...Microscopic ...Fragments  
(gasp) ...Of (gasp) ...Philosopher's Stone!

HG stops jumping to thrust both arms into the air and then wraps her arms around HE's neck in a victory hug. HE wraps her arms around HG's waist and melts into the hug. HG steps back quickly and frowns at HE.

HE: Okay, what's with the look this time?

HG: Holly, this is probably permanent but it may not be complete. You may exhibit unusual capabilities. You may even continue to ...um, mutate. We need to tell the Headmaster.

HE: How the Hell do you get 'tell Professor Dumb' from 'Holly is evolving'?

HG: Well, this bridges into areas of Alchemy. With Nicholas Flamel's passing, Dumbledore is the world's foremost authority on Alchemy.

HE: We're not trying to turn my eggs into gold, Hermione!

HG: No, you misunderstand. Alchemy is actually an advanced branch of Potions, merging with Transfiguration. To give you a muggle comparison, Potions is to Alchemy as Chemistry is to ...Genetics. From Perenelle's notes...

HE: You didn't tell me you cracked another section of her notebook.

HG: Three, actually.

HE looks at HG in a false expression of disbelief

HG: What? I've been petrified for two months! My mind is like a racehorse, it needs to run.

HE smiles.

HG: Anyway, Perenelle indicated that Nicholas turned lead to gold entirely by accident in trying to develop the Elixir of Youth. I mean honestly; how hard would it be for you or I to win in a Monte Carlo casino, with just a few of the spells we know? Money is easy. Eternal youth was his goal.

HE: That's as may be, but I don't see trusting the Headmaster with this. Not unless it gets desperate. I'll bear through somehow. Besides, for all the trouble it's caused, I'm normal enough right now. Whatever may come, I have a feeling my personal magic will adjust me to compensate.

HE sits back on the bed with a satisfied expression. HG sits down next to her shaking her head.

HG: I don't know. That's quite a gamble...

HE: (mockingly) And you wanted to go to Monte Carlo. My life is the definition of a high risk bet.

HE smiles at HG. HG looks at HE with her eyebrows raised in disbelief, and then grasps HE's hand in support and smirks.

HG: I guess we shall see.

HE: Yeah.

HG's face scrunches up in thought.

HG: When did you get to be as tall as me?

Transcription ends.

Holly

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21st June, 1993

Harry,

I sometimes forget why I prefer the insanity at Hogwarts, until I return to the Purgatory that is number 4 Privet Drive. My own mind started moving into survival mode when I was on the Express, though the circumstances probably had more to do with it. Now that I am here once more in my ramshackle bedroom with the broken mattress and the dingy plywood desk I can say that this is a cage. I am a creature. If the caretakers of my zoo relax their guard this summer, I am likely to break free and maul one or more of them before I rampage through the neighborhood looking for fresher meat. What's frightening is I actually am obsessing about meat right now. It's probably good that I sent Hedwig to Hermione with an apology a few minutes ago. Hedwig would never forgive me if I started chewing on her wing. I have no energy, though, so she'd outfly me if she sensed me turning predatory. I hope.

I'll let the Quill scroll out some stuff, maybe it'll help explain.

Transcription: 20th June, 1993 starting 2:04 PM GMT

Holly Evans (HE) and Hermione Granger (HG) are sitting alone in a cabin on the Hogwarts Express.

HG: So, your last cycle came on the 25th of May, after ending the previous cycle on the 1st of May. Assuming you continue to keep a human cycle, you're about to start cramping again. You'll probably be home when next you ...release.

HE: That place is not my home, but I get what you're saying. I need to get my head in order, or they'll be scraping Dursleys from the ceiling as I'm carted off in the bonkers van, Obliviated and wandless.

[pause]

Um ...Hermione? Should I need to break out of prison, may I seek asylum at your parent's house?

HG looks pleased and then her expression shadows into concern.

HG: Well, I'll work on them, but we're heading to France almost immediately for the summer. It's a compromise I made with them when they allowed me to go away for school. I come home for every break to travel with them, and I promised to talk with them in person before I willingly give up my virginity.

HE: Did you sign contracts?

HG: No, we agreed a handshake would ...Oooohh! You're having me on!

HE giggles as HG shoves her shoulder lightly. HE suddenly doubles over in pain.

HG: Oh, Holly! I'm sorry, I didn't mean...

HE: It's ...not that Hermione. (gasp) Your timing is well-calculated ...Hnnnnnhhh!

Transcription ends.

We'll skip over the thumping and groaning, shall we?

Transcription: 20th June, 1993 starting 3:11 PM GMT

Holly Evans (HE) lies in a foetal position on the floor of a cabin on the Hogwarts Express, her skirt pulled up to her waist. A pool of translucent liquid surrounds three dark grey eggs on the floor near HE's exposed legs and buttocks. Hermione Granger (HG) crouches over HE, one hand cradling HE's face. HG flourishes her wand at the eggs with her other hand.

HG: Tempus Adversor.

HE: W-what...what was that spell, Hermione?

HG: It's a stasis charm. The eggs won't develop or deteriorate while it's in effect. I looked it up after you told me about your last cycle.

HE grinds her teeth, bearing through another wave of painful tremors in her abdomen.

HE: And what are you planning to do with them next?

HG: Well, I'll place an impervious charm on them and then we'll see what Scarpin's has to say. It occurs to me that they didn't produce anything because they weren't fertilised. We'll need to find something appropriate to seed them with...

Holly suddenly grasps Hermione's forearm and squeezes so tightly HG yelps in pain.

HE: Who ARE you?

HG is stunned at HE's sudden hostility. HG stands up and away from HE as she releases her grip to slowly rise to a kneeling position on the floor.

HG: W-what do you mean?

HE: Who the fuck ARE YOU? I mean weeks ago you were ready to turn me in to Dumbledore for not telling him about my...mutation and now you want to try to...play God with the genetic material! Are you insane? How many Hermione's are in there? Is my friendship just a stimulating distraction?

HG stands stunned, looking guilty.

HG: I ...ummm...

HE: (crying) Don't you feel anything for me at all?!

HG seems unable to speak, and sits down heavily on the opposite bench, letting her gaze drop to her hands in her lap. HE stands up, looks at the fluid pooled on the wooden floor of the cabin with embarrassed disgust and then turns to leave the room.

HG: Holly, what do I do with the...

HE: Fucking figure it out. I have to rinse this skirt of yours before it corrodes away. Here's for a replacement.



HE tosses two Galleons over her shoulder as she leaves.

Transcription ends.

I went back for my trunk an hour later, finding Hermione had left. Her stuff was still there, so I adjourned to sit with Neville and some Gryffindor firsties who had the good sense not to try to speak with me.

Vernons response to my physical dilemma was almost heartening in its fulfillment of my expectations.

Transcription: 20th June, 1993 starting 7:38 PM GMT

Holly Evans (HE) collapses to the floor of the living room of the Dursley residence in obvious pain.

Vernon Dursley (VD): What's wrong with you now then?

HE breathes heavily through clenched teeth until the pain subsides.

HE: Uncle Vernon, a month ago I was poisoned and nearly crushed to death by an ancient 20 meter long snake. I was saved by a mythical bird of fire who cried healing tears into my wounds. At the time I was accompanied by a 1000 year old talking hat, who spat out Excalibur's brother onto my head, which I stuck through the snake's brain to kill it. I used the same sword to cleave apart a book which had possessed a girl who has been trying to kill me all year. I'm feeling a little ...off.

VD: Serves you right! You will confine yourself to your room, then, and I want none of your freakishness. Leave your trunk and your ...stick, there. We'll be locking that up straight away!

HE: Brilliant.

HE lays her wand on the trunk as she slowly rises to stand.

Transcription ends.

So that's where we are now. I have nothing, again. I can't quite reason out why I surrendered my stuff to Vernon just then, but it wasn't like I was in a position to fight him off. For now I have the journal, the Quill and my thoughts, which is enough to stave off sleep for awhile. I don't rest easily. My nightmares would make Clive Barker run to mummy.

Holly

Author's Note: Further acknowledgments

Rorschach's Blot for 'Make a Wish', which besides illustrating how comedy doesn't ruin the adventure gave me the idea for Holly's mutation at the hands of Basilisk venom and Phoenix tears. I added the bits of Flamel Stone to enhance the flavour.

Yes, I'm still channelling Fight Club. It just fits so well with Holly's attitude.

## Chapter 15 - Empty Places

23rd June, 1993

Harry,

Just bear with me on this one. I have to apply some pest control.

Transcription: 23rd June, 1993 starting 8:14 AM GMT

Holly Evans (HE) lies across her bed wearing a pair of oversized boy's pyjamas. Quill transcribes directly to journal sitting on her plywood desk. HE speaks aloud.

HE: I had the strangest dream just now. I think it may be one of those prophetic dreams I've had lately- Y'know, the ones that came true? I hope so. This one was just so hot it was too good to be true. (Gasp!)

Dudley Dursley (DD) stops at the slightly open door and leans against the doorframe just out of sight of the bed.

HE: I was laying on my bed, just like I am now, and I was busy touching myself in that special way. Well, as I start to get reeeeaally into it, my cousin Dudley walks into the room. His strong beefy arms sort of flexed as he walks toward me- I have to look at him upside down, as I had been thrashing about on the bed, getting all hhhott.

HE squirms a bit on her bed, moving a hand to rest between her legs. DD can be heard breathing heavily.

HE: So then Dudley says in this real deep voice. "Heh, Dad says whatever I do, I should use a condom." I look at him from my upside down position and say "It's alright Dudders; I'll make sure nothing goes wrong." As he turns to close the door, I twist up onto the bed and let these oversize tents just fall away from my otherwise naked body. I don't want anything to get ruined, after all. Dudley turns back and walks up to me where I am kneeling at the edge of the bed, my arms open wide. With a flick of my hand the door seals shut and all the locks latch together, then with a swish of the other hand I throw a Silencing Charm over the room, so our time together will be private.

Dudley reaches forward to caress my young breast, and as his fingers glance over my nipple, I swing out my arms once more. With an erotic thrust of my arm I cast the immobilizing charm, and then his body lifts up towards the ceiling with my levitation hex.

DD grunts from behind the door.

HE: (voice deepens and rises in excitement) Now that his succulent body is so perfectly positioned, I am able to truly appreciate his rolls of fatty flesh. The claw of my right hand slices open a six inch gash in his abdomen. I can see the blood and intestines just spilling out on to the floor. Such tasty, tasty flesh, not all skin and bones like before...

DD stumbles in the hallway, then is heard stomping down the stairs to the main floor of the house at a run.

DD: MUMMMMMMMYYYYYYYYYYY!

Transcription ends.

That should keep things lively. Dudders had been giving me an unwelcome eye for the last few days. I think it may have occurred to him that his parents may not interfere in his plans for my despoilment given their previous biases. What really disturbs me is that this dream I recounted was close to what I remember from last night's horror show. Dudley didn't stay long enough to hear me describe how I plucked out his eyes to chew or sucked the marrow from his detached leg while he lay there weeping and moaning to my utter annoyance. The attitude pervading my mind during this seemed to be one of 'I just wish the food would shut up already!' It seems to me if I'm to be saddled with fever dreams in this place, they should share in my joy.

I have to commend my own performance here. I barely have enough energy to thrash about at the moment. In fact, I think I'll go back to sleep.

Holly

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6th July, 1993

Harry,

Normally nothing happens here, so I haven't had much to write about aside from my nightmares. Dudley has kept an appropriate distance for the past fortnight, and I have been surviving well with Dobby's assistance. I had him bring my trunk to my room almost immediately after Vernon locked me in here the first night, and his expertise at Notice-Me-Not has made its presence a non-issue ever since. Occasionally, I even lose track of it. Dobby has been providing nourishing food from the limited options in the Dursley's icebox. It turns out the betrayer's scar on his cheek prevents Dobby from getting any aid from other elves and most magical merchants won't deal with him. I made one foray with his assistance into Diagon Alley and used up the money from the stipend pouch Prof McG gave me at the end of term to buy some extra clothes and preserved food. With the limited selection of acceptably muggle-styled clothes available from Madam Malkin's, I now have six identical school uniforms to work with. I consider it nearly miraculous that Malkin's had any knickers than weren't sized like winter-wear. Someday, I'll shop at a proper economy or second hand store, if I ever have the energy. Thank providence my breasts haven't really developed yet, as I was aghast at the armor she had for sale as training bras.

The rest of my days have been a never-ending cycle of sleep-nightmare-read-clean-sleep-nightmare-eat-read...I'm not always sure that what I'm dreaming isn't happening, until I wake up the next day to find that Vernon's feet haven't been removed, or Petunia's head wasn't twisted backwards in a fit of pique. I can't say for sure about that dream with Dudley, though. He does seem a bit slimmer now than when the summer started.

Part of my dis-temporal depression has to do with being cut off from my friends and acquaintances. The Grangers went on holiday, and the Weasleys carted the whole family out to Egypt to visit their wayward eldest, after winning some newspaper sweepstakes. Good on them, but it rots for me and Hedwig. I've had her trade a message apiece to Hermione and collectively to the twins, Ron and Ginny. The

round trip kept Hedwig away a week each time, and I got very lonely in her absence. Dobby's alright but makes a poor conversationalist, plus we are keeping his presence here as much a secret as possible, so his squeaky voice is only heard during the late night hours or when the Dursley's head out for a dinner. He's still very jumpy, and acts like I'm about to do him harm no matter how many times I reassure him otherwise. At least the 'gone quiet' arrangement has broken him of the habit of calling me 'Mistress' every fifth word. He just nods and squeaks when I give him an order.

My last nightmare was quite the show. I won't go into details so as not to interfere with your chances for a restful sleep, but somehow during my fitful thrashings within the nightmare I ended up chewing off the metal point of the Quick-quotes Quill. So much for the advertised 'indestructible nib'. I found it depressing in the extreme, knowing I had ruined my favorite (and only functional) quill, one that I received from Hermione as a gift and improved with her thoughtful cooperation and aid. This may lead you to ask 'what are using to write this, then?' It's a fair question, and I hadn't realised the answer until I started writing this entry. My fingertip.

I think perhaps the mutative magic may yet be burning through my body. In an effort to solve a problem my fingertip has sharpened itself into a quill point. I can draw ink from the bottle through the tip into my fingernail. It is a bit odd, and I'm sporting a constant dark blue ink stain there from the last knuckle downward, but I have to say as a mutation goes this one works for me.

Hey, cool. It retracts. The ink stain remains, though. Now I just have to find a different way to record things. At least my homework is done, and with a personal touch for the Potions essay no less.

Holly

P.S.: Oh shit. I just realised that this was what my 'claw' looked like in the nightmare I used on Dudley. I'm spooked.

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11th July, 1993

Harry,

Uncle Vernon made an announcement today that may spell the end of my career amongst the unincarcerated. His sister Marge is coming; 'Behold a pale hippopotamus; and the monkey that sat upon her was Liquor and Ripper followed in her wake.' Never has a more spiteful, hateful human being existed. In particular, Marge has in past taken great pleasure in sending her breded dogs to gnaw on me; Ripper chased me up the garden pear tree when I was eight to the amusement of the family. I wasn't let down until nightfall. This will be the greatest test of willpower and restraint I can possibly imagine. Pray for me.

Holly

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17th July, 1993

Harry,

I don't know if you're kept up on events, but if you're worried about me, don't be. I am safe. Don't send anyone after me. I'm fine.

Let me tell you my side, in case you're being fed bad information.

I had sustained a mostly even temper throughout Marge Dursley's visit using every trick I could dredge up from Perenelle's Occlumency notes to prevent a homicide. I almost made it. Marge would have been gone the next day, but I just couldn't let it go. She insulted Mum. I'll recount the conversation Quill-style and you can tell me if I truly did anything wrong.

Recounting of events starting after supper, the 15th July, 1993

Vernon Dursley (VD), Petunia Dursley (PD), Marge Dursley (MD) and Dudley Dursley (DD) surround the oak dining table in the Dursley household. Holly Evans is in the adjoining kitchen clearing the dishes

and cleaning up from preparing the evening meal. My stuff is written with quotes when I'm talking.

MD: Ehhhhxcellent nosh, Petunia. Just excellent.

PD: Why thank you Marjorie, it was nothing.

I thought to myself: Of course it was nothing; I cooked it all. I've been operating this entire meal in a non-Holly mode. I am a not-person, just doing the work needed. I've been channeling Dobby's Notice-Me-Not-ness as well as I could muster all week.

MD: I see you've got that one [nods towards Holly] more properly trained of late. Where was it you sent her then, Vernon?

VD: Hogwarts ...um ...Academy for Girls at Risk.

I smiled inwardly; 'HAG-at-Risk'?

MD: And do they use the paddle at eh hh ...Hogwarts?

VD: I think their techniques may be a bit more medieval. She doesn't speak much at all anymore.

MD: All for the best I'm sure. Bad enough she was born out of wedlock, you said her mother had another child?

PD: Yes, our nephew, Harry Potter. He doesn't stay here.

MD: Well, there you go you little freak! See what happens to children like you? The legitimate ones get homes and the bastards get foisted on my overburdened brother, here!

VD: Eh, Marge, perhaps a bit more Brandy...

MD: Don' interrupt! It's obvious where this one's headed. I've seen it before. If there's something wrong with the bitch, there's something wrong with the pup! No doubt you'll take to your mother's whoring ways like flies to shite!



I wanted to let Petunia field that one, except all I heard was silence. I asked quietly, "Aunt Petunia, have you nothing to say in my Mum's defense?"

MD: Hah! Obviously she is in accord...

I stopped being non-Holly and rose to my full height. My voice carried well and clearly.

"Your obsession with dogs wouldn't have anything to do with your poorly disguised background as a Carney, would it?"

MD: What?

VD: What?

PD: What?

"Well, I've always known you couldn't be directly related to Uncle Vernon. Despite bearing sufficient load to balance a raft against my uncle's girth, your physical resemblance to him ends at the size of your moustaches."

MD: Shut up.

VD: Enough out of you...

"Your slack-jawed ramblings in defense of a useless life devoted to raising bladder-emptying mongrels too hideous to be loved as a mutt are only tolerated round here for some leverage you must hold over my uncle."

MD: Shut Up!

VD: How dare you!

"I have always conjectured that one of your early show-winners was actually the mongoloid issue of some backseat sweat-fest between you and Vernon back in your school days. Such a scandal might motivate him enough to keep you sloshed on cheap brandy two weeks of the year. Was that it?"

MD: Shut Up!

VD: I'm warning you..!

PD: Vernon, is there something you need to tell me?

DD: Heh, good one!

"I can only assume you keep small dogs because the big ones can't ram their dog-parts up your constipated arse anymore."

MD: Shut up!

VD: That's the last straw!

PD: Vernon?

DD: Righteous!

"How often has Ripper been trapped within your abyssal knickers upon a Saturday night? No wonder he attacks at your command, you've been suckling him on your menstrual discharge until menopause struck, so now he's always hungry!"

MD: Shut Up! Shut Up! SHUUUUT UUUUUP!

"YOU SHUT UP, you stupid, hateful, drunken, abusive, slack-eyed, addle-pated GASBAG!"

That's when my magic finally took hold of the situation and then promptly sent it into a tailspin. With the last word in my rant I had flung my arms in the air in frustration, unfortunately releasing a crackle of power to arc across the room into Marge's chest. Before she could take another breath she swelled into a 1 1/2 meter sphere of apoplectic drunkard. The arc continued to flow from my fingertips, despite my urgings for it to stop. I could feel my magic flowing to inflate Marge into a painfully engorged humanoid zeppelin. Once she reached a full three meters diameter, balloon-Marge bounced away from the table out the open patio doors to the garden and began to

float away, breaking the circuit between my fingers and her chest. I felt the last dregs of my magic seeping away from me and it felt like death was closing in on me. I was seized by panic. Then my heart started pumping a thousand beats a minute as I realised that soon Obliviators would arrive. They would take away my memories and then my magic and all I would be left with was a life at the Dursleys, until I died or was pawned off as the fucktoy of one of Dudley's less careful gangmates. I can't describe the sudden absolute loss of reasoning that struck me. Only one thought could form in my head at that moment.

'Run.'

So I ran.

I ran all night and day. Literally.

I kept running in no particular direction, changing course only when confounded by industrial parks or parkway embankments. I ran with nothing more in my head but the absolute conviction that if I were to stop, I was dead. I finally ceased running when I was startled by the sudden appearance of the rising sun when I vaulted over a broken plaster-covered wall. I then promptly collapsed into a heap at the edge of this play park somewhere and started crying in anticipation of the Obliviators catching up with me to rob me of my personality. I fell asleep at some point, certain I would never be whole when I awoke. As it was, I wasn't pleased when I did awake as it was the first cramps of my next cycle that brought me painfully to consciousness. I had been asleep for hours as the sun was now descending behind the wall, but with stabbing pains in my uterus I could barely stand, not that I knew where I was going to go next anyway. My salvation appeared then in a screech and a flurry of white feathers.

Hedwig landed at my side and began to nudge at me, first my head, then my legs and then she tried to rouse me from my painful clench by talking. Her barks, pops, squeaks and screeches began to fill a pattern in my head. The pain seemed to abate as I realised I could just barely understand what my avian friend was trying to tell me.

"... with me if you want to live. I will lead you to the cat-girl's nest."

I could have wept. She couldn't have said anything more perfect. Which is why I'm surprised to find myself here at the Granger's; something that perfect should have been just another nightmarish hallucination. I jumped up and followed Hedwig at a loping run, but this time my pace was fueled with anticipation of relief and sanctuary. Each league that passed beneath my feet felt easier than the last. I could feel all my strength returning to me, urging me on to Hermione's house. I arrived there late that night to discover one simple problem with my perfect solution.

The Grangers are in France.

I laughed exhaustedly for a good five minutes on their front lawn at the sheer absurdity of it all, then I summoned Dobby and we broke in through the garden entrance to raid their icebox. Dobby retrieved my things from my room at the Dursleys without risking any chance of being detected by anyone. After a long soak in their tub for me and 3 bags of popcorn, we ended up falling asleep on the couch in front of their projection telly, endless cartoons playing in the background to feed my much-improved dreams.

So not to worry, we'll stay here a bit. The Grangers have an extensive library; I'm particularly interested in their biochemistry and medical textbooks. It looks like they haven't left behind a book since birth. I have no doubt this is the house of Granger. Where I belong.

Holly

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31st July, 1993

Dear Harry,

Happy Birthday. I asked Prof McG to send along my present. I hope she was able to get it to you, but she didn't seem certain it would work out. As you might not know, our holiday at the Grangers' house was cut short. It ended about eight days after it began with a knock

on the front door. Dobby reported back from a quick reconnaissance that 'Professor McGonakitty is at the gate!' Even if I wasn't already sure the jig was up, my unsuccessfully repressed guffaw would have given me away. Prof McG came in, assessed that my use of the Granger's house was acceptably respectful, and then insisted that I should be relocated to the Leaky Cauldron here in Diagon Alley. Her argument was that I wouldn't make a good impression on my friend's parents by meeting them formally for the first time as a burglar in their home, particularly as they returned from a long journey. She also assured me that my evasion of the Obliviators was entirely unnecessary, as what had occurred was obviously accidental magic. Marge has been deflated and the family is convinced my departure was planned and intentional. She said they were all a bit wary of me returning for the rest of summer, which I absolutely agreed was best avoided. I was a bit concerned at how she had found me, but Minerva reminded me that I wasn't the only person who could use their brain, and that this seemed the obvious choice assuming something horrible hadn't befallen me.

After a bit of cleanup, we (that is Dobby, Hedwig, Prof McG and I) transported to the Leaky Cauldron. Prof McG left a second pouch of coin, indicating that the first was only a holdover of what they could collect on short notice at the end of the year, and that this pouch was a complete assessment of my reimbursed tuition and expenses paid to date. I'm now 1253 Galleons to the good! Even more interesting, the pouch holds them all without weighing but three ounces. Why can't our book bags work like this?

Prof McG had a few warnings for me as well. Don't go into Gringott's Bank. Don't wander into Knockturn Alley. Don't leave the magical areas. She makes such an excellent tour guide.

I went immediately to the bank to convert some Galleons to pounds sterling, as there was a lonely clothing store out in the darkness calling my name. I can see why she might want to deter me from visiting though. The goblins who run the bank are some of the scarier folk I've met in the Magical world, which coming from me is saying something. Normally I'm drawn to those things others find detestable, but in this case my own senses were warning me to track every goblin within view. I was stared at by several throughout my brief visit

at the teller box. My best guess at their intentions is either I would make an excellent main course for some upcoming feast, or I was simply worth seizing for parts but they hadn't worked out a plan for splitting the spoils yet.

With a pocketful of notes I headed back to the Cauldron and out to normal London. I won't bore you with the details, but if you were a girl who had been wearing skirts for the last year, you'd be feeling just as exposed as I felt. Denims rule. Bike shorts should be part of the uniform, at least in winter. I am not a clothes horse of any stripe, but there is something simple and satisfying in wearing clothes that fit comfortably and aren't likely to expose your arse during a stiff breeze. I even indulged in a few thigh-high socks like the ones Neville gave me, as they come in... yeah alright. You don't care.

The last stop was back in the Alley. I had promised myself I would return to that curio shop in Knockturn Alley I landed in from my mispronounced Floo expedition as soon as I had money to make it useful. The owner and I got off to a rocky start, but it turns out my escapades at school have given me a reputation with his crowd. Enough of one at least that he was willing to accept I was there intentionally. I was even able to arrange for Dobby to buy from him in my name, so long as the money came up front. That makes one. I walked out of the shop laden with books and a few other curiosities. What happened next is best considered a story I heard about the place, and I will relate it as such.

Imagine a young girl with an arm full of merchandise walking in a dark alley where criminals trade stories, treasures, and favors as well as their gold permits. She evades all the more forward offers as she wends her way through the wretched citizenry who would linger in such a place. As she approaches the exit out to the more well-lit spaces of the world, a shadowed man steps in front of her. He chuckles lightly and points his short wand at her from his hip and whispers 'Imperio'. A wave of comfort and ease washes over the young girl's mind, startling her so that she drops her purchases to the ground. With barely a whisper, the shadowed man says "Oh, no. You should bring your books along, my little dearie. Pick them up and go into that doorway there."

The little girl feels like everything the shadowed man says is the essence of alright, and follows his instructions to the letter. She glides gracefully into the otherwise abandoned shop, followed closely by the shadowed man who closes the door behind them and seals it with a key. "Now let me take a look at you, little dearie. Turn 'round, place the books on the floor, and take off that cloak. You might as well keep removing any clothes you have, my little dearie." Deep in her mind, the young woman marvels at how easy all this seems to be. There must be something special about the word 'Imperio' to make her feel so amenable to her current task. With a slight shake of her head, she stops removing clothing when she is down to her knickers and an undershirt. "Why did you stop, little dearie?"

The young girl slowly strides up to the shadowed man who had taken a seat in a nearby side chair when the young girl began her striptease. The girl reaches out her right hand to caress the face of the shadowed man, noting his bald head, a distinctive black moustache and numerous small scars around his pale skull. As the shadowed man leans forward to kiss the girl, she allows her sharpened index finger to plunge deeply into the man's eye socket. The man jumps backward and out of the small chair, clutching his face in pain and surprise, dropping his wand to the floor. During his last moments of consciousness, he hears a buzzing come from the young girl as her fist approaches his face at a startling speed.

You should avoid Knockturn Alley. All sorts of criminals go there.

Holly

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## Chapter 16: Strange Conversations

4th August, 1993

Harry,

I made a new friend today, maybe. What's more important I suppose is that I have a second vendor willing to sell to Dobby. I'm just not sure I'll need that much ice cream while at school. I would have liked to record our conversation, but I get the feeling he wouldn't have sat to talk with me if I still had the Quill. It came about because I had a frustrating conversation with Ollivander the Weird Wand guy and just needed to stew, but the day was too nice and sunny for me to go back to my room at the Cauldron. Thus I sat down amongst the patio tables outside Florean Fortescue's Parlor of Iced Delights for a good sun-kissed sulk. The sandy-haired proprietor in his happy purple robes walked up from behind me when I had my eyes closed absorbing sunlight like a previously-submerged cactus or something.

"What can I get you, my dear?"

"You can SOD OFF you pervert! I want nothing you're selling and I'm harming no one!"

See, Mr. Fortescue couldn't have known that I would react badly to that simple question, but I went feral on him due to the mixture of hormone imbalance, information gathering roadblocks and the unfortunate choice of his to call me 'dear'. I'm still a bit sensitive to that term of affection after my near-rape in Knockturn Alley.

"Well, I can assure you I have no perverse intentions in my question, but you did sit at my establishment. As it is early in the day you are my only potential customer, so I don't think it would be out of line to suggest that your mood couldn't possibly be worsened with a bowl of ice cream. Have some basic chocolate glaze, on the house. It improves the mood of anyone not allergic to cocoa." Mr. Fortescue placed a bowl of ice cream in front of me that he seemed to summon from his pocket, though I noticed the subtle use of his wand from his left hand in an admirable piece of presentation. I couldn't help but feel like a heel.



"I apologise, sir. That looks quite good, actually. What's in it?"

"Well, if you must know this contains milk, cream, sugar, vanilla, cocoa, whey and a bit of a Cheering Draught. I felt it was the best option since I doubt my customer count will improve if your mood doesn't."

"You're telling me you were going to dose me with free ice cream?"

"Do you blame me?"

It took a minute, but I decided that Mr. Fortescue was much too interesting for me to continue being uselessly bitchy. I dug into the dish with much appreciation. Mr. Fortescue smiled, brought out a second bowl for himself and sat down.

"I hope you don't mind the company. You seem to be enjoying that too much for me not to want to share the experience. People should have a good time with others instead of alone whenever possible, I always say."

"I thought you said you had no perverse intentions, Mr. Fortescue."

"You see many layers, but no; what I said was that my question wasn't meant perversely. Even so, I have no designs on your body. I am happily married after all. If you don't mind my redirection, what has put you in such a state at your young age to so desperately need some of my glaze?"

"Well, if you must know I had a frustratingly uninformative talk about wands with Mr. Ollivander. You would think he would enjoy talking about his art, but all he wanted to do was sell me a polishing kit or a new wand holder. I even paid for a new wand! I hate asking intelligent questions and getting answers phrased as if I were in nappies. I'm short, not infantile."

"I disagree."

"Pardon?"

"You're only in your teens and five feet tall. I've met adults who are doomed never to see over my counter, including your Professor Flitwick. Mr. Ollivander wasn't treating you like a child for your size."

"No, he just didn't want to answer my questions and used the demeaning tone to chase me off from asking anything further."

Mr. Fortescue smiled at that point like he had found the missing piece for his collection of Chocolate Frog cards. "That's it exactly. I'm surprised you picked up his intentions so clearly. Aren't you in Gryffindor?"

"Mr. Fortescue, I believe you have me at a disadvantage. What can you tell me about myself that I haven't told you?"

"Well phrased! I will play this game I think, just for your enjoyment, but only if you buy the next round of ice cream."

"Done." I placed three galleons on the table.

"Are you truly that hungry, or are there other things you thirst for in this intercourse?"

"I like your insight as much or more than your ice cream, so far."

"Well then. You would be Miss Holly Evans, recently deposited by Professor McGonagall to stay the summer at the Leaky Cauldron. Your brother is Harry James Potter, savior of the British Wizarding World. You attend Hogwarts and are entering your third year there, assuming they haven't held you back due to lost time. After all, you were absent from classes for the last two months of term recovering from wounds sustained in your brother's battle to free you from the clutches of Salazar's monster, the Basilisk of the Chamber of Secrets. No, you wouldn't be held back. Despite your membership in house Gryffindor including their Quidditch squad where you play Seeker (when you're not hospitalised), you have exhibited a rather public tendency towards dark practices as any crimes and misdemeanors occurring at Hogwarts school since your arrival have had you near

the center of the drama. You were considered for house Slytherin and you have the gift of Parseltongue."

"It's not much of a gift."

"Why do you say that?"

"Well, in addition to giving my reputation another kick towards the dark side it has brought me little but trouble. Also, snakes are on the whole quite stupid, making their conversations very dull."

"I thought I had seen you trying to whisper to some pythons in front of the Creatures shop. What did they have to say?"

"Well, not much about what I was asking. They really only seed their eggs instinctually ...never mind."

"Why on Earth would you ask a snake how they fertilize an egg?"

"It ...was a Biblical thing. Snakes were supposed to have taught Eve about sex. I don't have good parental figures."

"I should think one would find better information at the bookstore about that."

"I'm sure you would. I however am not permitted into Flourish and Blott's for the foreseeable future, and they won't deal with my elf as he carries the Betrayer's scar."

"Ah yes, part of your reputation. I should continue my summary. You are rumored to be responsible for several muggle-style assaults on Hogwarts attendees, both students and faculty though you have not been legally mired by any of the incidents at school. You recently employed the Malfoy's crazed house-elf who was supposed to die and are associated with both the Weasley family and with a muggle-born witch who may be your thrall. That is the extent of what is known or reasonably suspected by the public."

I had to laugh at the last part. "Her name is Hermione Granger, and she is not my thrall. We're ...friends. She is absolutely brilliant and I wouldn't have survived this long without her help."

"Nor I suspect would she have survived without yours."

"Oh, I don't know. Maybe Hermione'd be safer if she didn't know me at all."

"Too late for that, and I've known you for a few minutes now and I don't feel any more threatened than I was before you arrived. Perhaps you can indulge me. What were you asking Mr. Ollivander that prompted such a cold response? Was there something wrong with your old wand or were you hoping to buy a second one?"

"No, I don't need a second wand. I was ordering one anonymously for a friend. He wasn't matched to the one he's using. No, I wanted to know how wands were tracked. I have been told that I am not permitted to use magic while home from school, yet when Professor McGonagall brought me here she indicated that I could use 'school magic' in my room without fear of persecution."

"Don't you mean prosecution?"

"You say 'tomahto'..."

"Well, what Mr. Ollivander could have told you (without breaking any oaths I'm aware of) is that he places a Registration Charm and an age-based tracker in every wand he sells. As the wand becomes acclimated to the new owner, the tracking charm evaluates the owner's chronological age and dissipates once they have reached their majority. The Registration remains however, to track the use of restricted spells."

"So, if someone were to steal my wand and cast an illegal spell with it, some alert would be set off saying I cast the spell?"

"Indeed. It is therefore imperative that one keeps their wand under their control at all times. Of course if it were lost to another wizard, the Registration Charm would eventually update after the wand had

acclimated to the new owner, assuming the two were compatible. These charms don't communicate instantly; for instance if one is in an Unplottable location the Registration Charm is unable to link to the Ministry detectors. It would probably wait until it could link back again to send any alerts, but even so a wand only retains a limited echo of recently cast spells. The Aurors use the *Priori Incantatem* spell to list out that echo, in case the Registration Charm was out of range or somehow removed."

"It can be removed? That doesn't seem to be very secure for the Aurors purposes."

"Well, removing the Charm from an Ollivander wand invariably takes away a good portion of its functional ability. I have heard of other wandmakers that were rumored to be less diligent in their crafting. One wouldn't find their type in this Alley."

"Isn't Hogwarts Unplottable?"

"Yes, I believe it is my dear. Oh! I apologise. My friend."

"Thanks for that. I had a bad encounter with an adult creature who kept referring to me that way. Thankfully I prevented him from making me his 'little dearie' and left him a reminder to adjust his perception of things."

"I hope you weren't too poorly handled. You seem to be recovering well."

"I heal quickly out of necessity."

Floean and I chatted for a while about less relevant things and I introduced him to Dobby, who was as happy as I've seen him to speak to another human without being looked at like walking garbage. I can't say Mr. Fortescue really is a friend as most of the information I received was paid for, but he certainly isn't an enemy that I can tell.

Holly

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12th August, 1993

Harry,

I had another interesting conversation with Florean today. He was chatting with me about Sirius Black who as you may know is the first person ever known to escape Azkaban prison. Mr. Black was heard by his keepers mumbling 'he'll be at Hogwarts' just a day prior to his escape after 12 years of incarceration. When I asked Florean what his crimes were, his response was interestingly specific. He said "Sirius Black was said to have betrayed the Potters to the Dark Lord, bringing about the confrontation that led to you becoming an orphan. He was caught at the scene after he used unknown magics to create an explosion that killed 12 muggles and the Potter's friend Peter Pettigrew. There are all sorts of rumours and innuendo surrounding those events, but Sirius Black was caught because he was still standing at the scene cackling madly when the Aurors arrived and he was imprisoned the very next day."

I couldn't help but compare Florean's description of that scene to my own notorious claim to fame with the Troll at Hogwarts. Maybe Mr. Black had just heard something funny after getting caught in the blast caused by two other combatants. That being said, I doubt after 12 years in Azkaban that he has many cards left in his deck. If I see him I'll run or fight as circumstances allow. You should do the same. In the meantime, I think I may delve tentatively into the rumours and innuendo portion of that statement. Every once in a while the press accidentally stumbles over a fact; usually you have to compare as many related stories as possible. Wherever they all agree it is either well-documented fact or an abject lie. Where they differ, someone probably has a fact and the rest are guesses as equally outrageous so that if the truth is revealed they can come back with how they had the real story and it was suppressed. On second thought, I don't think I have the patience for this.

Holly

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20th August, 1993

Harry,

I need to write about this, and this journal remains the one safe repository for my thoughts. Don't judge me too harshly. Although my mood swings have finally started to yield to my will, I'm still trying to get my mind under control. Nightly meditations have lessened the frequency of my horror dreams. What has me unhinged right now is the simple truth of my situation. I'm in love with a girl who likes boys.

Hermione caught up with me here at the Cauldron this morning. Her parents have dropped her off early at her insistence to spend time with me and get her books and supplies before we shuffle off to the Express. I was so happy to see her I swear half the regulars in the main room were staring at my smile in disbelief. As it was Hermione gave me one of her wonderful immersive hugs and after a brief reintroduction to her parents we adjourned to my room to catch up on the rest of the holidays. She's tanned again, making us look like such a mismatched pair- brown curly hair and bronzed skin set against straight burgundy hair and pale skin. At least she's only a few inches taller than me now. Hermione must have had a growth spurt in France, as she's about 5' 3" at this point.

I had already sent her a note of apology about crashing at her place, including the use of her clothes, bed and the disposal of three eggs in her garden that I had shed the day after I arrived. The first thing Hermione told me when we got to my room was that she had tracked down where I had left the eggs easily because the nearby rose bushes never looked so radiant. It made me feel less freakish the way she said that- as if I had given them a gift. We talked for a while about her choices in movies and music as I had sampled her collection during my stay. Mostly I got the sense that she had really thought about how things had gotten bad on the train ride home, and had been anxiously awaiting the opportunity to reconcile with me. Hermione apologised to me, saying she treated what must have been a humiliating and traumatic experience with less care for my emotional state as to what it all meant magically. She said it never occurred to her that I might be having a hard time with it as I always seem so strong. As an olive branch, Hermione offered to have me try

out Legilimency on her, so I could be sure to believe what she was telling me about her feelings and reactions.

How tremendous! I could never have asked her for such a gift, yet she understood enough about me to see how much offering this trust would mean to me. I was ready to snog her senseless right there. I suppose it's for the best that we actually went forward with the sifting first.

Even though I was doing the reading, I schooled my thoughts and got my mind as calm as possible given my anticipation. With a long look into Hermione's eyes and a deep breath exhaled slowly, I then whispered 'Legilimens'.

"How are my barriers, Holly?"

"Well, to be honest they look impressive but I can walk through them like tissue paper. We'll keep practising together this year and maybe we'll make some real progress."

"I look forward to it!"

I pushed forward into Hermione's mind. It reminded me of a busy traffic rotary, with multiple lanes of thought and memory passing in every direction. I could see silk-like tendrils that trailed from related memories all across her mental landscape. She seemed to sense my presence, because I was next flung into a series of scenes and images that played in fast-forward. Rather than try to force anything, I just allowed her to direct my travels for a bit. I could see her great sympathy for my plight when she was holding me on the train, watching helplessly as my body convulsed with pain, finally releasing the fluid and eggs in a disturbing spurt at the height of my repressed groan. I could feel her moment of disgust and an immediate counter-feeling of sympathy for me. Then I understood how it had shocked her. Saying what had gone on hadn't fully prepared her for seeing me expel the eggs, and her mind started rushing about trying to deal with the strangeness of the experience. Hermione had fallen back to what she was comfortable considering- this was a meta-scientific marvel, and we needed to collect as much information as possible.



I watched as my furious reaction unhinged her ability to handle the situation, and I felt the cold wave of despair wash over her as she realised how horrible she had just been to me. As I left, she sat in horror and wonder at both her own actions and my ability to bounce back from the affront and simply walk away. I could feel her admiration for me and a desperate hope that she might find some way to express her sorrow over what she had done, but she couldn't begin to phrase it and left to cry in the loo.

Hermione continued to play out how she had felt over the next few weeks, and I kept a part of my attention on it, but I had decided I needed to see something she might not want to show me, and I went looking for her memories of the Boxing Day potion mishap. I was convinced of her deep affection and belief in me, but I had to know what more she felt in that one moment where her desires exceeded her restraint.

I found the memories and played through them 'quietly' while still keeping part of my attention where Hermione's focus had first brought me. At the time we were assembled in Myrtle's room, Hermione was excited at the prospect of trying something without permission, and there was a real physical response of pleasure to it. What happened after she took the potion though was borne primarily of the influence of the rising cat-brain. I could hear the change in tone, and she even regarded my stroking of her fur as appropriate attention to one of 'Bastet's chosen' by a human. A Human. She was turned on by my touch, not because it was me but because I happened to be there, and she could smell my own erotic response and felt it would be a fair answer to that pheromonal question to say 'go ahead and pleasure me'. Afterwards her more human perceptions took ascendance and put her in a right state trying to reconcile the dichotomous feelings. I've had my share of inhuman thoughts of late, so I wasn't going to hold it against her, but as I followed the cat-brain's time in her head, I saw that she chose to attract boys. She especially focused on Cedric and the Ravenclaw captain Roger Davies, though Cat-Hermione rejected him afterwards as being dull and too easy to catch. (As a side note, she tried to lure Oliver Wood and discovered he was entirely uninterested in girls. That may explain why the Quidditch chasers always seem so bitchy- he won't respond to their flirting, making their competition with each other for his affections a complete

wash.) Hermione hadn't detected my split attention, and when I returned to her primary focus area she was just finishing her memories of reading my letter about breaking into her house. She felt sorry for the circumstance and amused that I should feel at all apologetic for going there, as she considered me closer than a sister and thus within my rights to stay there, which is how she presented it to her parents. They apparently are quite grateful that their daughter finally has a confidant, as she was so lonely in normal school.

Confronted by this obvious division in her affections, I pulled out of her mind in a state of shock.

Hermione just kept looking into my eyes as I sat there facing her on my bed. My Occlumency was forgotten, and all I could do was feel my rising frustration and anguish. I burst into tears then, and Hermione lunged forward to embrace me and hold me to her, saying soothingly "I'm so glad you understand how important you are to me. I can't imagine my life without you in it. I am so sorry for everything that went unsaid. Please tell me you forgive me."

If I hadn't just been inside her head, I would have been jumping for joy at those words, completely misinterpreting her intent. Instead I just held her as close as I could, crying out for the loss of my only opportunity for love. I love her as I would love the one I want to die with, and she loves me like the close sister she never had and always desperately wanted. All that was left for me was tears.

Holly

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21st August, 1993

Harry,

Still not sure if Florean is a friend, but he is smart and talented. For another round of overpriced desserts, he gave me the best advice about Hermione I could have wanted. Either that or I'm being groomed to take over his shop in a century.

I had gone out early to seek his counsel or at least his sympathy for my plight. I left three galleons on the table again, as my need for his attention was pressing.

"How is it possible that you have once again darkened my patio tables now that your friend has returned?"

"Floean, if I tell you something and insist that it be kept a secret, would you keep it or do I need to ask for an oath or something?"

"Well I should think you would know better than confess anything in an open marketplace, no matter what oath I were to give, and I don't give oaths unless I have wronged someone. That hasn't happened for decades, I assure you. Perhaps I can venture a guess and say you are out of sorts because your feelings for your friend are unrequited."

"That's very astute."

"Thank you. I am a student of human nature by hobby. I think you might find some insight to your situation, as I often do, by observing the nuances of my customers' choice of ice cream. Most people have a favorite flavour of ice cream, but they can easily branch out to other similar flavours without too much concern. You might consider it a kind of preference."

I was beginning to see where Floean was going when he emphasized the word Preference. My unhappiness was momentarily set aside as I tried to parse out the subtext of his monologue, idly sampling a bit of apple turnover with ice cream he had placed in front of me as he sat down.

"It isn't an absolute, my young friend. Preference is a matter of degrees- some may be entirely a fan of fruit in their ice cream, where others cannot stand it at all, while many fall in the space between. Ask anyone which they are and they'll know immediately, but give them a taste when they aren't expecting it and you might win a convert ...or lose a customer, and therein lays the risk. While many who act sophisticated may claim they prefer all types of flavours, there is always some measure of preference. To be indifferent would

be a clear indication that one didn't appreciate either end of the spectrum for their true and specific natures. For those that claim their choice is the only reasonable one, there is inevitably a desire to paint the opposition side as insane. Interestingly, these same purists would claim that those who embrace the widest selection as valid are universally gluttons, unable to sate their appetites with a single selection. I assure you that in my business as an ice cream merchant, a wider selection does not lead to more frequent purchases. One must like ice cream, but to enjoy it does not mean one needs it at all times. The young ones are always prone to overindulge, gorging themselves when they find an unrestricted supply. They inevitably end up either having a horrible reaction to one or more samples, or just shock themselves to look back at their choices, ashamed at their indulgences, and carrying the evidence of their mistakes in excess weight for many years. If one has a bad experience with their first taste, they may swear off ice cream forever, but more often than not a less than satisfying experience will lead a person to return to the same flavour. They have no faith that there might be something better out there, and are willing to take the bittersweet experience that they can rely on rather than risk a greater disappointment. Others may decide that another flavour, exactly the opposite of their original bad experience has to taste better than the first that affected them so badly. Sometimes I see customers who insist on mixing scoops, trying to concoct flavours beyond my own carefully balanced selections. Only rarely does this result in an innovation; mostly the customer just ends up becoming sick, losing any appreciation for the individual flavours involved, or even finding that they can no longer stand one of their favorite flavours due the association with the unfortunate incident."

"I think you may have wandered off topic, Mr. Fortescue."

"Please, just Florean. Just plain, simple Florean. I may have strayed a bit from your concern, but I assure you I was still on topic."

Florean nudged his seat closer to mine to ensure a bit more privacy, even though there weren't any other customers about. I found myself staring into his dark brown eyes and getting a little excited with his proximity. Florean cuts a dashing look for being in his fifties, and his

eyes are small but expressive. Thankfully Florean shifted the discussion back to my original concern, as he put it.

"Your friend may not be entirely a vanilla girl. She may require subtle inclusions of...cinnamon to expand her palate."

I grinned at the metaphor "Cinnamon?"

"One shouldn't be too wedded to an analogy, but I suspect that you may be characterized as perhaps an unusual cinnamon custard equally suited to caramel topping as for slices of fresh orange or vanilla glaze."

"Why would you think that?"

"Because my friend, you seem to like my caramel eyes too much for you to be purely a Girl's girl."

Before I could excuse my blush, Florean again assured me he was happily married and has no designs on my body. "I find your mind so much more ...delectable."

Again I was blushing, but my girlish impulse was tinted with a bit of paranoia. As I reapplied my forgotten Occlumency discipline, Florean shifted back his chair and presented a new bowl from within his robes, this one of a chocolate that seemed unusually red, reminding me a bit of my new hair color.

"Try this, if you would. It is a new flavour but based upon very old recipes. It is a mixture of chocolate and cinnamon, in an old Mayan tradition."

I was grateful for the change in focus and dipped my spoon into the new bowl to take a taste. At first, it was quite scrumptious, better than chocolate alone by far. Then the cinnamon hit and the burning suffused my mouth. In my desperation, I looked for something to ease the burn- ice cream! I took a new taste and the burning was replaced with a soothing wash of ice creamy enjoyment, but then the burn came back. After a second and third round of burn-ease-burn I

shoved the dish away from me and simply bore through the discomfort until the burning subsided.

"It seems like you have to enjoy the pain to get to enjoy the flavour, or keep eating it constantly to the exclusion of all else. I kinda like it, but I probably wouldn't order it knowing that ahead of time."

Floean was giving me and the dish a wary look. "Yes, it is unique. I'm thinking of calling it Chocolate LeStrange."

Floean took the bowl away back into the shop, leaving me to ponder all we had talked about. I get his point. Hermione may not see me in the light of being her lover, because she hasn't considered it. I should also consider that Hermione is not the only person in the world I could love. I need to open my mind to the possibilities. The Strange Chocolate has me thinking as well- if I am the Cinnamon and Hermione is the Chocolate, we could be a powerful combination, but there will be pain with the pleasure. Maybe I'm reading too much into this, but at least I feel hopeful again.

After a moment I discretely checked my dessert spoon and my mind for leftover influences and found nothing of note from the confection but there was a little mark on my mental barrier- a sort of calling card. It said 'I just stopped by to say hi, and to say that you have a lovely wall. You should work on the house.'

I've decided Floean is funny but not 'nice', his pleasantness is a smokescreen for a sharp mind and so his value in my estimation just doubled.

Holly

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31st August, 1993

Harry,

I had several interesting conversations today. The Weasleys came to the Cauldron in preparation for our return to school on the Express.

Immediately, Ron was protesting the treatment of his pathetic yellow rat by Hermione's new smush-faced familiar, a half-Kneazle ginger cat I bought for her named Crookshanks. I suppose Scabbers is being unjustly persecuted, as Hermione's angry little friend (who isn't me) has been chasing the rat throughout the entire building since their arrival. I know Crooks isn't hungry. He ate half my ice cream at Florean's this morning before I gave him to Hermione.

Hermione loves her new pet. Crookshanks also likes his new pet. I love Legilimens; it clears the barriers between us animals, if they're willing and smart enough. I've almost got it down without the wand- I didn't want the proprietor at the Creatures shop to be upset with me casting spells on his wares, but he seemed relieved to be unburdened of Crooks' company. The cat definitely is a piece of work and almost wouldn't come with me until I assured him that he wasn't to be my familiar but was intended for someone I could guarantee would have cat affinity. When I explained all this to Hermione, she nearly squealed in excitement, saying I had achieved a temporary Rapport. This is some sort of mutual Legilimens effect that allows mind-to-mind speaking. The effect didn't last long; as soon as I started thinking on anything aside from the conversation or even broke eye contact the link was dropped, but I can see a lot of value in developing this as a skill. Hermione instantly started to practice on Crooks until after her fourth attempt she turned to me and said "How rude! As if I would do that for a cat, even if I do care for him!" Crooks wandered off to find a sunbeam and Hermione left to put his new carrier and supplies with her trunk. That's when the Weasley parents came to speak with me. Without getting pedantic, let's just say they were concerned I might try to hunt down the rogue Sirius Black, given his involvement in our family's misfortune. I assured them that I never go looking for trouble, but usually have a few contingency plans for when trouble finds me. I don't think they were very reassured by that response, but they did seem to feel that they had executed their duty and then went off to see about rooms.

Hermione and I retired to my room to commiserate on mind magic and other research.

"Hermione, I want to talk to you about something."

"Alright."

"I've thought about what you were feeling on the train, and I think you're right. What is happening to me is special, and it makes sense that we should explore what it means."

I then sheepishly brought out the last three eggs I had expelled the night after Florean talked with me about Sirius Black. I had collected them up and put them in a soup bowl, applying the stasis charm after a few failed attempts based upon my spotty memory of Hermione's spell work on the train. Hermione returned my sheepish look as she drew a small mason jar from her purse with the three eggs from the train. We laughed together for a bit then combined the samples in her mason jar.

"Hermione, this will be heading into areas we don't want anyone else to know about. You know that, right?"

"Of course! The whole subject could be deeply humiliating. I would never say anything to embarrass you if I could help it."

"That's not what I mean. Hermione, I am not normal. This is not normal. People might want to kill us for trying to do anything with what are essentially my unborn fetuses. Just tell me you understand that our research in this will probably take us well outside the boundaries of what's covered in Flourish and Blott's"

"Good for you then, you'll be able to get the books on your own!"

"Hermione!"

"Holly, I understand. We are walking into uncharted territory. I won't flinch. I am with you on this. This is for you, to see what might happen and what we can do to make your life better. For damn sure you deserve better."

I nodded to acknowledge her earnest sentiment, and then smiled at her with a wink.

"Oooh, curse for my sake again Hermione! It makes me all tingly!"



Hermione laughed with me, and I felt like I had just added the first dash of cinnamon.

Holly

P.S.: I stopped back at Fortescue's early, before we had to go to catch the Express. I found Florean behind the counter and stared meaningfully into his eyes. "I want more." He pulled out a packed container of the Strange Chocolate charmed to keep it frosty. "Don't rush to eat it. Savor the flavor, Holly."

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Author's Notes: The ingredients list for Florean's Chocolate Glace was taken from a container of Breyer's All Natural, except for the Cheering Draught, of course. In Florean's description of sexual habits like ice cream preferences, please indulge me by not trying too hard to parse out the meaning of every metaphor- as Florean said, you shouldn't get too wedded to an analogy. Cinnamon-Chocolate ice cream was something I actually experienced; the first time I tried it was from a boutique dessert shop in Minneapolis. It was an unusually masochistic choice for a summer's day. Haagen-Dazs now makes a more palatable version called Mayan Chocolate. Florean's speech patterns were lifted from the character Elim Garak on Star Trek: Deep Space Nine. Read into that what you will.

## Chapter 17: Twisted Tracks

2nd September, 1993

Harry,

There was this time right before the end of term last year when Hermione and I returned to Potions class. It was the first time Snape saw me as a red head. It was a bit odd, but it was a good memory. I captured it with the Quill but transcribed it to parchment because I didn't want to lose it but didn't see a reason to include it in the journal until now.

Transcription: 9th June, 1993 starting 8:01 AM GMT

Severus Snape (SS) stands at the front of a Potions lab classroom staring down at paperwork. Holly Evans (HE) and Hermione Granger (HG) enter the almost full classroom.

SS: Well, well. The sisters of Gryffindor return. I doubt even your efforts can save your pathetic House's standing in this class. I'm not entirely sure how you survived...

SS looks up and freezes, staring at HE. HE stops as well, looking back at SS. HG stands still as well, looking slowly between the two for a minute.

[pause]

Pansy Parkinson (PP): Sir, you were saying...

HE: (interrupts loudly) We are very sorry for disappointing you by surviving, Professor. Hermione and I will endeavor to die horribly, within the coming year if possible.

SS is shocked into smirking, and then schools his face into a mask of disdain. HE grins in triumph at having broken his normally imperturbable scowl.

SS: See that you do. A Gryffindor should always keep her promises. Take your seats!

Transcription ends.

The reason good memories like these matter to me is because of Fudge. Minister of Magic Cornelius Fudge in his quite limited wisdom has decided that with the escaped convict Sirius Black rumoured to be heading to Hogwarts to attack the heroic Harry Potter, that the Dementors of Azkaban should be released from their isolated duties around the prison in the North Sea to surround the Hogwarts castle as a measure of defense. More importantly, Fudge has ordered that they roam the countryside looking for their wayward lamb. We were actually having a decent time on the Express until they came aboard to hunt for the convict and suck out my soul for a snack.

On the train, the Twins caught up with me long enough to relate these recent events and that public opinion puts you living in the castle since 'you always seem to be there when things get interesting'. As a sideline, they mentioned that they are almost positive that there's no way you're living in the castle. "Believe us! We would know!" The level of certainty they conveyed with that simple statement had me so distracted that I hadn't noticed their sister had joined Hermione and Neville in our train cabin, though Neville wandered off immediately to find some snacks and give us privacy.

Ginny apologised for everything that she said and did, though she couldn't remember large parts of it and then she asked if we could start again with a blank slate. I answered her coldly.

"What a 'Nice' idea. It reminds me of Obliviation."

Hermione goggled her eyes realising how angry this little girl was making me, but before she could interrupt Ginny spoke again, somewhat sadly but with a challenge in her tone "sometimes it's better to just forget."

Hermione jumped in by stepping in front of me and laying her hand on my shoulder. She whispered a quick admonition. "Don't you think the Weasleys have been through enough this past year?" She turned

to Ginny and looked down at the redhead who finally realised she had seriously misspoken.

"Holly and I have had bad experiences with Obliviation. What's more, your brother Percy's friend Penny was ...well ...if she was still alive and her memory was restored, she may have decided that death was better, but she would have been happy that there was a Spider stalking Hogwarts around Christmas."

After a minute Ginny gasped at the implication.

Hermione sat down next to Ginny and softened her tone. I just went back to lifting my trunk into place while listening to Hermione's voice.

"Ginny, your memories are what defines you, and teaches you what to expect. Without your memories, you won't learn what is unacceptable to you, nor think of how you may do things differently when faced with a hard decision. How would you know what to look out for, if you couldn't remember what went wrong the first time, nor remember the consequences?"

This was much more eloquent than what I was thinking; 'if you always forgive and forget the things done to you, you're nothing but a dog'. I decided that Ginny deserved a second chance, or else I was being just as limited in my thinking. I also realised that Percy was still a victim of the Slytherins and should be told at some point. Of course I couldn't do anything for him immediately, but I could do something for Ginny.

"Ginny, can I assume that the 'real you' was the one talking my ear off about Harry last summer?"

"Yeah, that's more like me."

"Well, if you can find it in your heart not to ever do that again, I'd like to know what else you think about. Even your brother Ron splits his time between Quidditch and food."

Ginny smiled. Hermione laughed and they started chatting about Ron. Neville showed up again. We settled in, most of them chatting

amiably about their summer, new clothes and upcoming classes. Eventually Hermione dragged me back into the conversation by talking about my Quick Quotes Quill. When they all insisted that I show them how I bit through the tip during a nightmare earlier in the summer, I pulled my trunk back down from the rack with Neville trying to help me. I was crouched down facing away from the door digging into the depths of my stuff (with Neville commenting on how strong I was for a small girl) when we picked up another visitor- Dean Thomas.

"Excuse me ladies ... and Neville, I was just swinging by to see if you wanted to sign up for a study group we are ...WHOAH! That is one fine derriere my dear! I don't believe we've met before. My name's...."

I had stood and turned around to face him with my hands at my hips and a stern expression coupled with a cocked eyebrow. Dean lost the train of his thought for a moment.

"Um... Holly. I'm sorry if I offended you. You really didn't look like this the last time I saw you."

"Yeah? What of it?"

"Well, to put it a little more nicely, I think you look excellent. Your clothes do you justice and your hair color is quite a thrilling change. You're like a new woman. One I'd like to get to know better. I feel like an idiot for not seeing your beauty before."

Dean's switch from obnoxious boy into Casanova was not unwelcome. For sure I haven't been given much praise before and never for my looks. I took a moment to look back at him. He was known as a confident and attractive boy but I had never really cared to look before.

"You're not so bad yourself. I'll give you points for recovering your cool. Don't trip on anything as you leave."

Dean walked out but gave me a lingering look as he slid the door closed. Ginny started gushing immediately.

"Oh Merlin! I never would have guessed he would stop in here! That boy just exudes smexyness from his pores! Holly, if you're not interested, please introduce me!"

Hermione lost it when Ginny started abusing the English language.

"What sort of word is smexyness? What are you on about? I admit Dean has a pleasant face and all, but he's not a rock star or something..."

I couldn't hear what Hermione was saying after a short bit because I was starting to see visions in my head, and the room got very cold of a sudden.

The visions put me back in the Chamber, facing my worst injustices in trying to generate tears, and then I was reliving each of those horrible moments as if it was happening all over again. When we got past the frying pan, I had a muddled vision of being in a bed of some sort, looking upwards as a woman screamed and the room was filled with green light. Then I saw a handsome but unearthly man with a cruel expression point his wand at me and my mind exploded in a painful cacophony of sound and light.

As I came back to consciousness, I found I was lying on the floor of the cabin, my head in Neville's lap and Hermione rubbing my arms and pushing the hair out of my face with an expression of deep concern etched across her frown.

"Oh thank God, Holly! Here, eat this chocolate. Professor Lupin gave it to us after he chased away the Dementor."

Hermione leaned forward to whisper in my ear.

"We've all eaten some- it's alright. It really helps chase away the ...dread."

Hermione was right of course and I quickly was regaining my color and mental defenses with the lump of chocolate dissolving in my mouth.

"So, what happened, exactly?"

"Well we met our new Defense teacher!"

"Ginny!"

"He said we should focus on happy thoughts..."

Hermione turned back to me after everyone settled back into their seats and recounted her view of events.

"You looked very distracted, and then the room became cold like a meat locker. I could see Neville's breath! Then this wave of ...dread washed over us all and you collapsed onto the floor. I found I couldn't get up but I saw this ...creature in a black cloak slide into the room and put its hooded face down towards yours. There was this sound like a wind on a moor and you started to convulse, but then the door slammed open and Professor Lupin jumped in, with his wand emitting a white light that made the Dementor quickly turn away from you and leave. He introduced himself and then passed out these chunks of chocolate, which he said were prescribed for recovering from a Dementor attack. He sort of gasped when he saw you on the floor there, then checked that you were breathing and rushed out, mentioning we should give you some of the chocolate when you awoke."

"So, we might have a teacher who knows what he's doing for once. What's he like?"

"Well he's tall and thin, but sort of attractive in a just-been-mugged sort of way." Hermione whispered the next part, sounding almost like Lavender, I swear. "He gave you the same longing look Professor Snape did before you said we'd try to die horribly for him."

"You're all hopeless."

Neville piped up then.

"He seemed kind, did Mr. ...ahh ...Professor Lupin. He ...uuh ...he seemed to really care whether we were really okay or what."

"Thanks Neville. For once, I get the lowdown without the date-ability report."

We all sort of receded to our thoughts for the rest of the trip, though Ginny did start to get talkative again after about ten minutes. Professor Lupin did not make a second appearance.

That was not the end of the weirdness though. As we started to leave the train car in Hogsmeade, Ginny turned to look next to me and said "Luna, what do you think of Professor Lupin?"

I turned to my left to see the drowned-looking girl that was stalking me last March was sitting right next to me holding a magazine upside down in front of her, and seemed to have been there the whole time! Hermione and Neville were equally stunned, so I know it wasn't just me that missed her presence. 'Luna' mumbled airily from behind her periodical "I think he should be feeling much better over the next few days." Ginny and she walked off the train leaving me weirded and paranoid. Then the rest of us followed the two girls out to the station and I was hit with another unbalancer.

"What the hell are those?"

Hermione looked at me strangely and then said "Those are the carriages that take us to the castle- oh right! You missed them last year because of Ron and the auto. We just ride in them up to the front doors and head in- they'll handle our trunks."

"Not the carriages, Hermione. What are THOSE?!"

I pointed directly at the nightmarish skeletal winged horse that was attached to the front of the carriage, but Hermione gave me a sad expression.

"Are you sure you've fully recovered from the attack?" She pushed me into the carriage following Luna and Ginny, where I sat down but stuck my head back out the window to regard the creature once more.

Hermione kept assuring me there was nothing of concern out there, but then Luna piped up again from behind her periodical saying



"Those are Thestrals. I can see them too. You're as sane as I am, at least in this."

I finally had my head in the game and started to defend myself to Luna for some reason.

"I think you've heard a few stories about me."

An unconcerned 'Yes' came from behind the oversized parchment.

"Well, I'm not as bad as they say."

She slowly lowered her periodical to stare at me with these bulbous eyes of hers and kept staring, then answered my challenge after a minute.

"Not yet..."

Ginny and Hermione were watching us like a tennis match. I felt like I was in a samurai movie, or maybe a spaghetti western, facing down an unknown opponent across a dusty street. Luna's stare was discomfoting, but I kept my eyes locked on hers with my Occlumency at full defense. Luna broke the uncomfortable silence with a toneless question and a blink of her ocean blue eyes.

"Are you going to eat me, Holly Evans?"

I gave a half smirk and answered pleasantly "I hadn't planned on it."

Tensions in the carriage dropped back to normal levels and Luna raised her periodical in front of her face again. Then she added a comment that will have me guessing for days.

"Pity."

The feast was interesting, as the Sorting Hat joined Professor Flitwick's chorus for a piece after the sorting but before the meal. Since the whole train was fed bunches of chocolate by Lupin, only Ron was complaining about the delay. The chorus seemed to lift everyone's spirits. Dumbledore referred to it as 'a magic beyond any

we study here', then suggested that while Hogwarts is under siege by Dementors that we keep the lights on and the conversation flowing. Hagrid was announced as the new Care of Magical Creatures teacher, but he was looking less than enthusiastic for his new role which did not escape the Slytherins who started all sorts of grumbling at the announcement. Dumbledore calmed the room and Lupin was introduced.

I have to agree with Hermione that he looked like he hadn't quite recovered from a rugby brawl, even aside from confronting the Dementors. His clothing was worn and threadbare with stitches of repair and his face had numerous scars, which only added to his beaten-down image. He makes you want to take him in and serve him a cuppa. I doubt his Defense technique amounts to looking like a kicked puppy but I just hope he isn't too smart. I just realised I owe him a life debt now.

Holly

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3rd September, 1993

Harry,

Some mornings it's just great to hang around for a late breakfast.

Hermione just came back from her first class only about 20 minutes after it started, looking quite stunned. She asked somewhat haltingly "Did you know that girls aren't permitted to take the Centaur language course until after fifth year for some reason?"

She related that the male Centaur instructor was calling the roll and protested that she didn't smell like a Herman at all. "I said quite forcefully that I should be allowed to take the class no matter the clerical error, but then he ...then he..."

"He what?"

Hermione's expression recovered a bit of McGonagall at that point. "Our centaur instructor reared up in anger, clopping his fore hooves together quite loudly. I felt it was best to leave at that point." Hermione then sort of reverted to the shocked look she had when she first sat down.

I suggested that the problem may have to do with their lack of clothing and our lack of maturity, and they wouldn't send an unescorted foal into human territory to teach us girls the language no matter how much we paid. Eventually her brain kicked in to agree with me.

"Um, yes. That's makes some sense I suppose."

After a pause I offered a quiet assurance to my lost-looking friend.

"It's distracting, isn't it?"

"Yes, very." she mumbled quietly.

"About as big as your arm, if I recall."

"I really couldn't say, and would rather not spend the time estimating if you don't mind."

Ron was finishing his fourth helping of a late breakfast and piped in "Sausage?" Hermione glared at him and the overstuffed cooked meat he was offering at the end of his fork, and then bolted from the table to head out of the Great Hall. I turned back to Ron and gave him a happy smile which he returned, then realised he didn't know why I was smiling and got concerned.

"Did you want some?"

"No. I really haven't a taste for it these days."

Holly

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20th September, 1993

Harry,

I came back here to the dorm to look for something, but I figure you might want to know how things are going. Life under Dementor siege is hard, but I have been involved in a masterful plan to improve the lot of all affected, even if I had no intention of changing things as they stood. You see, I'd rather keep Hermione in my bed than help the rest of the school sleep better. This all starts with me visiting Hagrid.

After the welcoming feast I went to see Hagrid, knowing that he might be having a time dealing with Dementors again so soon after his unjust stay in Azkaban last April. Hermione had been called to Prof McG's office so I followed him down to his hut alone. Hagrid invited me in and immediately started thanking me again for supporting him- he knew I had forced his early release. I chatted with him a while, eventually using my experience on the train to make him feel protective of me with all these spectres about. Hagrid was having a hard time resisting their depressing influence for his own sake, but saying I needed him to be strong and protect me from them just jump-started his courage. Once Hagrid had perked up, he proudly introduced me to his new friend and first class topic, the Hippogriff Buckbeak. Hagrid tried to show me how you bow in submission and respect to the horse-eagle, but Buckbeak was having a serious issue with my presence so we went back inside the hut to let him calm down. We chatted some more about his classes and Hippogriffs and Thestrals until curfew approached. As I left I was struck by an inspiration, so I went back around to Buckbeak's paddock for one more try. Hagrid and I had agreed that I shouldn't try flying on Bucky for the first class if he was going to be this skittish around me, but I really wanted to relate to this magnificent creature. Standing across from Buckbeak, I bowed low and waited for him to do the same. When he nodded forward and returned to his defensive wariness, I pulled out the flute Hagrid gave me so long ago and started to play a tune Hedwig had taught me. Hagrid was pleased as punch when he came out from his hut to see Bucky prancing his forepaws back and forth to my tune, and I was almost giggling when Hedwig landed on the fence next to me to bark out the rhythm, shifting back and forth on his talons just as Bucky was.

That night the girls in our dorm came to an understanding that has been the source of much torture and happiness for me. Parvati was complaining that the effect of the Dementors was making it impossible to get warm, even with multiple warming charms and a double-sized hot chocolate. The logical solution according to Hermione was for us to share beds together- the Dementors induce cold and feed off feelings of isolation, so having someone to share warmth just made sense. Lavender looked at Parvati and shrugged. Parvati looked pensive for just a moment and then smiled and said it was a wonderful suggestion. I didn't say a thing. Hermione confessed that night as we held each other under four blankets that she was glad to be sharing a bed with me instead of one of the others, as I give off a lot of heat when we hug. I ran through my nighttime meditations twice as hard to make sure I kept my nightmares at bay and my hands in the safest places. By the end of the week, everyone was asking Par and Lav how they kept a sunny disposition through the siege and 'their' solution swept through the grapevine like wildfire. The boys were generally of the opinion that they didn't need anyone to keep them warm (especially not their dorm mates) and the evening announcements on Friday included a warning that the House heads and male prefects would be patrolling the boys' dorms to ensure no indiscretions betwixt couples were committed by using this 'Dementor Defense' excuse. The defenses on the girls' dorms were considered sufficient deterrent to not require scrutiny. I guess their priority isn't acts of lust so much as unwanted pregnancies. Watching the results unfold at the House tables, I was seeing a pattern. The Hufflepuffs seemed to be in the best mood overall. The Slytherins didn't seem to be affected universally- I have a feeling the patrols there are scheduled and announced, so anyone in their dorms who already had a partner was getting good rest. The Ravenclaws were interesting as they seemed to be having the worst time with this, apart from some very content looking same-sex pairings, plus Chang and her constant companion Marietta something. Chang looked well-rested, but I sensed that her red-headed friend was being tortured much like I am. The difference is I've been wrestling with nightmarish demons of poison and fire in my head and body for five months, so my Occlumency has become a well-trained reflex. Marietta must be rubbing the polish off her wand something fierce.

The poor Gryffindors were the ones truly suffering. With the exception of Wood and his study partner, there wasn't a well-rested boy in the lot. Even the twins seemed less than jovial, putting to rest any fantasies our dorm mates had about them sharing everything. Half the girls were looking like walking death until we convinced them that sleep meant sleep, so long as they were brave enough to face each other in the morning.

During our Care of Magical Creatures class shared with the Slytherins Bucky kept nudging me because he wanted me to play the flute again. This prompted Draco Malfoy to approach Bucky with a life-threatening amount of disdain and Bucky tore at his arm to send him away. Draco fell to pieces over his shredded robes and the trickle of blood, forcing Hagrid to cart Draco off to hospital leaving everyone else just standing around. With nothing but a pushy Hippogriff to interest us, I decided to play a tune. I was eight bars into my version of "I can't help falling in love with you" (the version I heard from Hermione's collection included a tin whistle for the melody) when Hermione stopped me and turned to Seamus Finnegan.

"You know the song right?"

"Yeh, yeh, Granger. I know it. 'Sa Irish band y'know..."

So Seamus upturned a milking pail and started pounding out the Celtic drum part, I played the flute intro and Hermione started singing, much to the surprise and delight of everyone around. Bucky was dancing and everyone had a good time and for just a few moments, the siege was lifted for one class.

I tried to complement Hermione on her singing but she ran off on a mission for the rest of the day. That night, she returned from her research to ask me to help her bring several large and heavy boxes back to the middle of the Gryffindor common room. We retrieved her unknown bounty from a spare room near Prof McG's Transfiguration classroom and once we had returned, Hermione dragged the twins over to pitch her idea.

"Everyone is depressed."

"Well that's brilliant deduction, Granger! Two points for stating the obvious."

"Fred, quiet. I have a solution."

"How d'you know he's Fred?"

"RADIOS!"

Hermione then unpacked a broken Wizarding Wireless from the first box and explained her plan.

"Everyone would sleep better if they could hear music to offset the Dementors' effect. We saw it today in Care. Unfortunately, the Wizarding Wireless only plays annoying music suitable for retired dancehall instructors. What we need is a local station, and music that our generation will enjoy."

"Y'know Lee would make an excellent announcer..."

"...and Dad would help us hook into the Wizarding Wireless signal. We just need a turntable or two."

Ginny sidled over and spoke up as she started to look through the supplies. "Box three has one."

Ron piped up "Maybe you could broadcast the Quidditch matches, too."

At that point, the most unusual player entered the discussion. Head Boy Percy stopped in front of us and put down an older Victrola and gently handed Hermione a vinyl record.

"This was Penelope's. Play it first, and I won't get in your way in the least."

Hermione looked down at the label and read it aloud. "What a Wonderful World, by Louis Armstrong."

I pulled Hermione away from the Weasleys, all of whom were gathering together in the center of the room to share in their new purpose and bond.

"That was a really nice thing you did, Hermione."

"Well, they needed it. I certainly don't want to be involved after this. We have too much else to work on, and you just know they'll try to make me sing again."

"You didn't seem to mind singing down at Hagrid's hut."

"That was for you. You never want to be the center of attention, so all the attention on you is bad. Now people may remember something good about you."

I love her.

One week later, WWRX: Weasley Wireless Roxx- the prescription of music in the cold, cold night came to the airwaves from their lab built up in that spare room near McG's office. Like a muggle college station, the twins didn't need a huge transmitter to reach the extent of the grounds and they made back my initial investment in Wireless boxes (thank you Dobby and Florean) as the Twins resold them in the Great Hall to all comers. At first Led Zepplin and Jethro Tull looked to get heavy airplay due to a lack of other options; only devotees would bring albums to school they couldn't play. Hermione, Dean Thomas and the Creevey brothers then colluded on acquiring a wider selection from their homes and I sent Dobby to Hermione's house to leave a note and hijack half her parents' extensive Motown collection. The administration allows the radios to play except during dinner and from 7-10 PM to afford folks time to study, but the Weasleys have arranged it somehow to broadcast all night with a queued selection of calming classical pieces after midnight. Peeves makes for an interesting DJ on the weekend- he favors polkas on Sunday, starting around 4 AM. I can't yet reason why the twins taught him to spin discs- I suppose they'll need someone to take the mantle once they pass their NEWTs. I doubt the station will be sustained past the lurking Dementors, but you never know with these things.



Hermione was cuddled next to me in my bed last night when she asked me why I don't get more involved. I told her I am not the one to look for when seeking a way to ease the minds of nervous people. I didn't tell her I'd rather keep her in my bed than help the whole school sleep better. I did however let her know I was thinking about her another way.

"I have a confession to make, Hermione."

"You don't need to be so tentative, Holly. I think we're close enough to not worry about what the other person is thinking."

(Interestingly this reminded me we haven't tried any Mind Arts since returning to school. Back to the moment.)

"Alright. I wanted to apologise. I was wrong about the Muladhara chakra being concentrated here."

I touched the base of her spine where her tail had been, feeling her tense up a bit as I had to reach down under her waistband to touch her sacrum at the base of her spine. "That's actually the Svadhisthana chakra, source of creativity and procreation. The Muladhara chakra...is ...at the perineum." I hadn't shifted my hand at all but Hermione pushed her body back to look into my eyes, putting the low chakras further away from my reach.

"W-w-well you did touch me there, later."

"I did, but I didn't like that I got my facts wrong. You should be able to trust me."

I pulled my hand back up from her waist to cup her cheek. Hermione shuddered a little. I could feel her pulse racing. I jauntily said "Goodnight!" and turned over to face away from her.

When I woke up this morning, she was shivering at the edge of the bed. I encouraged her to sleepily turn back into my embrace. When she woke up an hour later I was holding her head to my shoulder and her arms were wrapped around my waist. She smiled up at me then got a confused look. I smiled back, waiting for her to say something.

Hermione finally decided to forego discussion and got up for a shower, after which we escaped from the room with our day's needs. That was a few hours ago. I came back here just after eating breakfast with Hermione to look for something and write in the journal while she attends the Muggle Studies class. I just noticed that I Wasn't Supposed To Notice Hermione's bed and pulled back her bed curtains. It just proves something I've always suspected; if you're looking for only one thing, you may search for a long time without success. If you are looking for all sorts of things, you'll find something you didn't realise you were missing. I found Hermione. Again.

Holly

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22nd September, 1993

Harry,

I need to go over the same time period I last wrote about to explain why Hermione was in her bed while also at class. There's a certain irony to that.

If you remember, I played a small prank on Hermione while she was petrified by signing her up for all the elective options offered for third years. For my own selections, I had chosen to add Care of Magical Creatures, Ancient Runes, Arithmancy and language groups-Romance. It's funny- in muggle school they study a single language; in the magical world you're committed to learning all the strains of an ancient root language as if they were dialects. My one language class covers Greek, Latin, Italian, French, Spanish, Portuguese and Roma. It makes sense when you start breaking down the meanings into root words and structures. Scripts are more a determinant of difficulty, so learning Greek is actually the hardest part of the course. Anyway, my selections were accepted except that I was bumped from Arithmancy and assigned to Divination. After arguing with McG and the headmaster for a day, I resolved that the grades didn't matter- I'd just follow along with Hermione as she studied the Arithmantic texts and ask her to explain things I didn't get. She agreed, but seemed to take

a few minutes in thought before doing so. I realise now that she was calculating how much time that would require.

When I asked her if she got all the classes she wanted, she smiled in acknowledgement of my joke and said that she certainly did, except she dropped Divination and was denied access to Magical Society, Politics and Law for some reason. I didn't think much of it at the time, but I was surprised that she was still assigned to take Centauri when she came back shell-shocked that first morning. Hermione has been keeping very busy and always seems to be deep in a scroll of homework, but I hadn't suspected anything truly unusual was happening until I tried to find her after Transfiguration one day. I had followed her up towards the astronomy tower, but then saw her heading across a lower plaza towards the Arithmancy classroom. Sometimes she would be working on Romance languages, and other times the scripts were Cyrillic or Sanskrit. I know Hermione reads ahead when she can, but that would be at least three language groups along with Ancient Runes to work through. I was getting concerned she might start speaking Gobbledygook when I asked for the salt.

Well, finding a second Hermione made all that come together. Hermione hadn't dropped any classes she hadn't been forced to; she simply found a way to attend them all. No wonder she was looking frazzled.

I woke up the second Hermione and laid out my reasoning about why she was there and what was going on. Within moments she was crying about how she wasn't supposed to let anyone know but she hated keeping secrets from me and please could I just help her stay out of trouble with Prof McG.

I had to force her to calm down by holding her, then she confessed her 'dark secret'; Prof McG had given her a magic device called a Time Turner, to help her catch up with lost time last year. Hermione explained how the Time Turner worked and I made her a promise. I would help her get it all done. All she had to do was take me with her.

Hermione's mistake was in only using the Turner when she was falling behind or needed to attend two concurrent classes. The Turner

allows a person to go back up to six hours and live a second time through the same time period, as a study and research tool. The important rules are these:

1. Don't try to change what has happened, as it has happened already
2. Don't interact with your other self or 'bad things will happen'
3. You can only exist twice during the same time; the Turner won't turn if it already exists twice in time. You can tell when you have caught up with yourself when the Turner is able to turn again.
4. Don't try to use a second Turner if you are already using one. More 'bad things will happen'

It's gratifying to know that there are enough of these things floating around that they would know that, and allow a fourteen year-old girl to play with one. The instructors must know about this arrangement or they'd get suspicious very fast. Also, I think this may have been something Prof McG was going to give Hermione even if she hadn't lost time being frozen last year. Justin Finch-Fletchley and Colin Creevey were frozen for most of the year, but they don't act like they're keeping track of two lives.

So now Hermione and I are living at double-speed. We get together in the morning and turn back six hours to study and do homework in her bed where the curtain and a Silencio cover our activities. We live through to lunchtime then turn back six hours and attend a second set of classes or get in some more studying. We eat a second meal in the dorm courtesy of Dobby then nap into the evening, then turn back to attend afternoon classes and evening activities. We get ready for bed then turn back to experiment in Myrtle's room, making it back to sleep the night with our dorm mates none the wiser. My only regret; everyone else is going to be subjected to my pleasant moods every two weeks when my cycle hits again. No wonder Hermione wanted us to sleep together- she needed her bed as a second privacy space.

With these new arrangements, I have begun attending the Arithmancy classes under the Cloak. I will not be deterred from

learning what I want. Now I just need to convince Hermione she shouldn't bother with Muggle Studies unless she needs the comedic relief. 20 classes are enough.

Holly

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#### Author's Notes:

The line at the beginning about 'endeavoring to die horribly within the next year' was another Trek reference, this time from the Deep Space Nine episode "You Are Cordially Invited...".

CoMC class heard the version of "I Can't Help Falling in Love with You" by Lick the Tins, which I originally heard from the Some Kind of Wonderful soundtrack.

My expanded class list includes the following-

Core classes: Astronomy; Charms; Defense Against the Dark Arts; Herbology; History of Magic; Potions; Transfiguration

3rd year Core additions: Ancient Runes; Arithmancy; Care of Magical Creatures; Divination; Muggle Studies

3rd year supplemental: Accounting; Fine Arts; Household Skills; Magical Society, Politics and Law (purebloods and sponsored halfbloods only); Music; Personal Care Magics; Poetry and Literature

Magical Languages (available by arrangement with native speaker): Mermish; Centauri; Gobbledygook

Regional languages: Romance languages; Germanic tongues; Slavic speech; Islamic sources (includes North African and Near Eastern cultures); Buddha's path (Asian and Subcontinental tongues)

Other language groups available by arrangement with native speaker.

The only saving grace for Hermione is that none of my supplemental classes have an OWL or NEWT certification exam.

## Chapter 18: The Marauders Return

23rd October, 1993

Harry,

I've some time to write as I'm sitting in hospital. I'm fine; it's Hermione that's bedridden this time.

I forgot to mention it before but Hermione and I exchanged birthday gifts the day before I confronted her about the Time Turner. Hermione bought me some French swimwear. I was once again caught between my hopes and reality; Hermione discovered that Lycra is resistant to my caustic fluids, though she did select some very flattering colors and patterns for me. My gift to her was one of a matching pair of jade rings I bought from Borgin's and Burke's- they buzz or heat up when brought near poisons or magically tainted food or drink. We both have taken to wearing them on our index finger, though for comfort we usually take them off for potions labs. After a few intermittent meals where we kept moving things off our plates like chess pieces, the mass of our closer Gryffindor acquaintances have taken to waiting for us to start eating before choosing their own selections, particularly as a Quidditch match approaches. Ron has inadvertently volunteered to act as our canary in the coalmine by not giving in to paranoia- he still eats whatever is placed before him. It took an extra week for Neville to realise there was nothing wrong with the kippers; it's just that neither Hermione nor I like them with breakfast. Despite these precautions Hermione is here in hospital for being poisoned, sorta by me.

This is a Slytherin problem.

With Hermione occupied taking twice as many classes as the human brain was meant to handle, you may wonder what I'm doing with my extra time. Well, apart from a grueling slog to bring up my Maths knowledge to something useful for Arithmancy, I've been running, brewing and plotting. I run around the castle grounds at least once a day, usually at night and under the Cloak when no one will notice my feet fluttering around. I find it's useful in burning off excess energy generated from sleeping 5 inches too far from the one I love, and my

endurance has seen a jump in performance ever since my marathon escape to Granger sanctuary.

We have been brewing in Myrtle's room once more, this time with several different concoctions in process. We've made several attempts at Veritaserum that have all ended toxic, and the salves and Blood Replenishing draught are making halting progress, but my Incubation Bath seems to be coming along nicely. As an aside, I think the title Moste Potente Potions may be a mistranslation for 'Potions that take bleeding forever to brew'. There isn't a quick recipe in the lot. Since I'm not sure when in the future we may acquire the ...necessary ingredients to develop my eggs, I'm in no rush to finish the Bath. That may explain why it's coming out better- brewing seems to be a reflective, patient Art, not unlike fishing. We could start another revolution at Hogwarts- the rise of fishing potion masters. Hermione has the portable water-proof flames mastered, so we just need to design a boat with a cauldron in the middle that won't sink.

I hate to just sit and wait, so the rest of my time has been about the plotting, which brings me back to the Slytherins.

Marcus Flint has returned to Hogwarts.

With the death of Penelope Clearwater, whatever threat of exposure had permitted the Headmaster to expel Flint has evaporated, and he was reinstated as a seventh year to work on his NEWTs and return to the Slytherin Quidditch squad. Lack of evidence. It's the only reason I regret pummeling Lockhart into infancy. I was just gearing up to take Percy aside and tell him of last year's unproveable crimes, but with the primary perpetrator back in the mix that has to be shelved. If I do anything to Flint and Percy is aware of the motivations, he will be torn between turning me in and helping me out. I don't need the help, at least not from him, so I've sworn Hermione to secrecy on this for now on the promise to her that I would tell him the truth before he leaves Hogwarts for a career.

In addition, the general Slytherin population has been energized of late over the lifting of my detente with Professor Snape. The Professor held me after class a few days after the Weasley Wireless Radios started easing everyone's mood to ...settle accounts I guess.



"Evans. You seem to be getting a ...reputation. The Weasleys have made minor celebrities of themselves with their money-making musical disruption, but even the youngest Slytherins can see your and Granger's hands in making them successful. What's more is that people are starting to believe your dour personality is a smokescreen, a way to protect yourself and your ...sibling from fame-seekers. Even I have noticed a softening in your demeanor. I would think you'd be more conscious of the threats that surround you following your experiences last year. It's time for you to fend for yourself in my classroom. You would do well to take more ...care during our labs."

I took a moment to think through what the Professor said before responding.

"Thank you for your concern, Professor. I have been more relaxed of late, but with the return of Marcus Flint my focus is returning."

"Worried for your Quidditch chances?"

"If our combat was restricted to the pitch I wouldn't have mentioned it, Sir."

I actually felt a touch on my Occlumency barrier just then, and I picked up the smallest hint of surprise in the Professor's non-reaction. It took a lot of effort to hold back a grin.

"Professor, please be assured that on the whole I still don't actually like people. I am merely discovering a few individuals who deserve closer inspection." Preferably without clothing. I didn't say that.

"Very well." The Professor looked at me for another minute, seeming to try and make a decision. "I noticed towards the end of Granger's first stay in hospital last year that she had clawed apart an Advanced Potion Making Guide. Rather than see her upset over the loss of a pristine volume, I saw that you gave her your copy. It's an essential work for any future potions mistress. Take a school copy if you can't afford to supply your library appropriately." He dropped a beaten-up version of the Guide onto my desk. "Our time is done. We'll see if two years amnesty has made you soft or opened your eyes. Leave."

I grabbed the book with a nod and exited quickly. The book was exactly what Professor Snape said it was and more. Every page was filled with scribbled notes on preparation techniques, alternate instructions and occasionally entire spells with Arithmantic equation work showing the process of discovery.

I sat with Hermione later (which was actually earlier) to show it to her and lay out what I thought was being said.

"This is amazing! And he just handed it to you?"

"Not exactly. He's ended the detente and is formally letting me know the Slytherins are gunning for us, more for revenge over Draco's embarrassment with Buckbeak but also because Gryffindor is becoming well-regarded again. Our House's reputation has been in the toilet for a few decades, but now with the radio station we are acting like leaders instead of hooligans. The book is payment for the Basilisk share."

"I hardly think that's fair! One book in exchange for an incredible opportunity to work with an extremely rare creature's parts and a payoff that could afford him his own shop in Hogsmeade! I was so jealous when I found out I had missed that chance."

"Well, I missed it too, but I think Fate was listening to my heart-having you alive is much more valuable to me. Besides, this book...it's his own secret work! He values our skills well enough to share his best techniques with us!"

"Your skills, maybe. I can't satisfy that man."

I cocked an eyebrow at her inadvertent double-meaning. "Nor should you be trying to. Hermione, you're missing the point. He knows I trust you and that you'll get access to this too. Looking to get his approval is a sure path to frustration and disappointment."

"You seem to have gained his respect."

"Maybe, but only because I hear the meaning beneath what's said. What did he say about your last assignment?"

"Uh, ummm, 'Granger! Your excessive stirring is diminishing the potency! Don't let your insipid enthusiasm taint your work! 10 points from Gryffindor!' and then, the Oily Bat sneer."

"And what did he tell you? Not 'what did you feel', but what was he communicating?"

"I was stirring too fast, which actually affects potency. I suppose that was useful..."

"That part's right, but he also said 'your work is excellent but will be tainted if you're not careful' and 'calm the hell down and I won't verbally abuse you!'"

"And the ten points?"

"Cover for helping a Gryffindor. Really Hermione, why do points matter?"

"So you think he actually thinks I'm good?"

"Hermione, I'm concerned that once you graduate he'll offer you an apprenticeship just to see how long it will take to seduce you into marrying him."

I really wish she wouldn't get thoughtful when I say things like that.

The end of Snape's detente was announced during the following potions class wherein I was criticized for my hair color, my height, my Goggles and my new glasses (Hermione insisted I have eyewear for more formal occasions than labs and combat), the shape of my cauldron, my clothes, the possibility of my father having been Filch and the supposed humiliation of having my brother who won't speak to me come to my rescue ...and still not give a rat's ass enough to check up on me in hospital!

Actually, that last bit after the rescue was from me to you. Wanker. Send a card next time. I show up every day for Hermione and I still bring her flowers.

Since then the Slytherins have taken every opportunity to speak ill of my lineage, appearance and associations. After the first few days, it occurred to me that unless they get a response they'll probably escalate their attacks, so now I periodically stage a crying fit and run out of class. I was right back in second year- it is better for the abusers when you whimper.

My dance with Flint commenced at the first Quidditch match of the season on the 10th October. This early game was almost rescheduled as a Gryffindor-Hufflepuff contest due to Draco's slow recovery from his 'horrible' Hippogriff wound. Oliver was indifferent as he just wanted to get into playing, but I wanted to force the Flint confrontation in a public arena. Hermione and I asked Oliver why Gryffindor had to forfeit when I was hospitalised last year, which prompted him to drag us over to the Staff table. Hermione piped in that professional league play required a forfeit if the team couldn't field all positions, but that alternates were a common recourse. Professor Snape argued that we couldn't go back to change last year's standings and McGonagall had agreed to his request for a reschedule. I put forth that Draco had an alternate, as Terrance Higgs was the Slytherin seeker two years ago and was only replaced when Draco bought his way onto the team. That started a taunting match between both squads who had gathered around the table to follow the discussion, and we were back on the schedule. I got an interesting look of appreciation from Higgs as we were all being carted back to the dorms or to hospital following the breakdown of civility. He nodded my way like a fairly challenged knight acknowledges their opponent. Later in the Gryffindor common room, Ron complimented Hermione on her knowledge of Quidditch regulations. She blushed and then said it was 'just something that had caught her interest'. She then mentioned that our team should select alternates for key positions in case this becomes an issue later. Ron almost plowed through us trying to get to Oliver with the idea. I wonder if Oliver will mistake his enthusiasm for personal interest? I've noticed Wood, Draco, Colin and a few others giving Ron a strangely lingering stare. I'd warn Ron, but if he can't take the hint about our

taint-detecting rings then his clue-meter is no doubt well out of calibration.

Flint spent most of the match trying to find ways to crash into me, force the Bludgers at me or otherwise plow me into the ground. I spent most of my time evading his attempts while giving Gryffindor plenty of opportunity to run up the score with penalty shots and disrupted defenses against our chasers. Higgs caught the snitch in the third hour, but it wasn't enough to defeat us with our 200 point lead and I escaped relatively undamaged. The Gryffindor chasers chastised me as lame for not catching the snitch. Even Hermione approached me as I emerged from the locker room after the game to ask if I was alright.

"Not really. I was cramping something awful." I then discreetly handed her a pair of my Lycra bike shorts wrapped around the three eggs I had tried desperately to not crush for the last half-hour of the match while riding at top speeds and making sudden turns. Hermione goggled and quickly shoved the moist package into her bookbag and then gave me a hug. I cried for a second then decided to make the best of it.

"Realise you've got my undies, Hermione. You can stop looking at my bum." This prompted her to reflexively look back over my shoulder to glance at my seamless Quidditch leggings, and then blush as she realised I had played her.

"Wench!"

"Bum-looker!"

"Holly!"

"Cheeky Monkey!"

"Well, obviously you're fully recovered."

I winced in pain as the cramping returned.

"Serves you right!"

"Hermione, do you have some special ability to control my cramps when I make fun of you?"

"Yes! You should be more respectful of me in the future."

We walked back to the dorm together with her arm across my shoulders, which really helped me when the pain hit hard.

I should have anticipated the escalation. I may act upset at the time but I don't generate any fear when they start taunting again. This is how I ended up poisoning Hermione.

We were in a double-potions lab, brewing a potion used as component in several other concoctions used for fighting crop blight and in veterinary cures. Our battles in the lab have become their own chess matches, as we keep track not only of our brewing but the actions of those around us and anything that may be prepared ahead of time. It's an engaging exercise, but if anything I've become convinced that defense is a losing strategy. No matter your preparations, the assaulting force will come up with another avenue you hadn't considered or can't protect. In this case, I wasn't looking up and I hadn't checked our cauldron area for charms or runes. What took place should have resulted in Hermione's death. At a critical juncture in the brewing process, an ashwinder egg dropped into our pot from where it had been levitated near the ceiling. During the few seconds as the egg's nature changed our brew into a roiling putrid green mass, a charm was triggered causing the front foot of the cauldron to melt, tipping the fluid forward to splash all over Hermione's face and chest, except now the fluid was mustard yellow and smelled like food. Hermione's skin was tinted the same color, making me think their tampering had been limited to a prank. I saw it all happen and couldn't do a thing, but I could see Pansy Parkinson hiding her wand that had been levitating the egg into place. What's more, I saw that she was very disappointed with the results. I immediately charged across the aisle and punched her in the face- I actually was aiming for her jaw but she seemed to lean into it. Before I could continue my assault I was grabbed from behind by Neville, Seamus and Ron. I chose to continue with a verbal response as I struggled to break free of my housemates.

"Is this what you wanted Pansy? Does my pummeling you make you hot? I know Draco has no desire to give you satisfaction as he's being serviced by his buttboys at night! It must make you feel worthless to know how little you mean to him that he would throw you into my path! No wonder you want me to hurt you! It's the only strong feeling anyone has for you aside from pity!"

"Miss Evans! Miss Granger has been poisoned! Take her immediately to Madame Pomfrey!"

"What?"

It was then things became silent enough for me to hear Hermione's rasping breath as she lay on the floor clutching at her throat. I broke free from the boys and Neville and I rushed to pick Hermione up and carry her out of the classroom. Seamus followed up bearing a slip of paper for Madame Pomfrey written by Snape explaining what had affected her.

After delivering Hermione here, the boys returned to class while I helped Poppy grab ingredients. Snape's note explained the formula and described the damaging effect it would have on the lungs. Once Hermione was stabilised I was given a dressing down by Prof McG for my physically aggressive response. My defense is what prompted me to action once more.

"You should have seen it, Professor! Pansy was upset that the potion didn't work right. In fact, what they did should have made it a fast-working acid! The only reason Hermione isn't dead or disfigured now is that somehow it was also tainted with curry powder....OH MY GOD! I have to go!"

I ran back to Hermione and grabbed the Time Turner from around her neck then bolted from the hospital wing ignoring Prof McG's protests. Once in an isolated room I worked out my game plan.

"Dobby!"

The elf appeared with a pop and squeak of acknowledgement.

"You can talk here, Dobby. I need ... umm... nine ounces of curry powder as fast as you can!"

The elf disappeared with a salute, reappearing several minutes later as I paced the dusty classroom. He had a huge black eye but a proud look as he handed me a small sweets bag filled with the necessary spice.

"Thanks, Dobby. You are, literally, a life-saver! Put this salve on your eye. We'll talk later."

I handed Dobby a vial of bruise-reducing lotion I keep in my quiver, swept the Cloak over me and turned the Turner back as far as it would turn, in this case being an hour as we were clearing a second run through right before Potions started.

I can't change what happens, but I think I need to make sure that it does happen. If I don't add the curry to our cauldron right after the egg is added, the mixture remains an acid and Hermione's face and chest will look like the remains of Christmas feast. I kept smelling the curry during the lesson but couldn't figure why, as it only would be a factor if the reagent was modified. The whole line of thought started because I smelled the spice and looked up how it would be used for this, since neither of us had grabbed any.

I was able to take a second look at the event from my hidden and silenced view once I had snuck back into the classroom. First I blew a small measure of curry at my previous Turn's face, then carefully moved back to observe the scene. I could see Pansy applying the charm to our cauldron while we were getting ingredients. I took a moment after she settled in her chair to stand in front of Pansy and stare into her eyes. If I could sift her thoughts, I might know who else was involved and what they expected. What surprised me was that Pansy actually had an Occlumency barrier. It wasn't strong, but just finding it spoke volumes, and I backed off so she wouldn't suspect my attempt at intrusion. When she started to look around with concern, I hit her with a little sneeze jinx to distract her. Hearing it this time reminded me of hearing it the first time through. As she set up to drop



her egg into our cauldron, I moved into a position to drop the curry in right after.

Plop; Fizz; Ploop; sudden smell of Indian food.

Knowing what came next I moved around to stand behind Pansy. As I saw my other self rising to 'greet' her physically, I gave Pansy's shoulder a shove from behind. I enjoyed hearing the crack again as my double struck her head.

Later as I caught up with myself about to Turn back on this mission, I saw that Pansy was also being brought to hospital, for a shattered eyesocket. She was moved to a bed at the far side of the room and placed behind a privacy curtain that I happen to know has several proximity wards on it. Poppy knows me too well.

Hermione's scorched lungs were the best result I can imagine, barring her simply being teleported away from the gushing mixture. She will recover completely in four days. Hermione woke up earlier long enough for me to give her a recounting of events and the best hug I could muster. She hoarsely made me promise not to try anything against Pansy, lest we risk inducing further escalation.

I've been reviewing my memories of Potions classes over these past years with some clarity of distance. I believe that Snape uses these taunts and abuses to teach his Slytherins how power can be exerted through authority. His classes are a combination of Potions and political theory with a domination elective. Pairing the Slytherins with Gryffindors makes for a fertile testing ground as we Lions tend to be bold and reactive. Snape gets exaggerated results suitable for instruction. My problem now is that the next natural step in this lesson is for the ruling authority (Snape) and its protected agents (the Slytherins) to attack the thorny problem (me) by undermining any safety nets and alliances that provide strength. Of course they targeted Hermione, sacrificing a loud but minor piece (Pansy). Now they need to widen my isolation and damage me in ways I don't defend against well. They'll try to drive a wedge between me and the Weasleys or Quidditch is going to get uglier somehow, and our experiments in Myrtle's lab are probably at risk. I should also warn the twins to protect WWRX from attacks. For sure, Hermione and I

need to watch our backs. For once my spiny-ness is serving me well- I have only a few valuable resources to defend. Then we'll see about offense.

Holly

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1st November, 1993

Harry,

In my renewed focus on anti-snake combat strategy, I lost track of a greater issue- the unknown agenda of escaped murderer Sirius Black. I say unknown because Hermione and I have recently uncovered some interesting facts with the help of the Weasley twins that make me think Mr. Black's assault on the Gryffindor dorm entry last night was not the actions of a Riddle minion. As we are all stuck camping out in the Great Hall by Headmaster decree, Hermione and I won't be able to escape to the library for research. We had just finished sleeping until 5 AM before we Turned back to start our second nighttime run through, so neither of us is particularly tired. The last few hours have been interesting, but first I need to explain a little about Professor Remus John Lupin.

He and I don't get along.

Initial DADA classes did go well as he's calm and collected and always has an intelligent answer to a decent question, but I ended up in an argument with him over Dementors, a topic of much interest nowadays. Professor Lupin said that they feed off positive emotions, stealing away every happy thought you have.

"That's not what happened!"

"Miss ...umm ...Evans? You have an opinion?"

I stood up as we had been taught to do when making an extended point. "You were there on the train! It didn't take away my happy thoughts..."

Blaise Zabini piped in "Do you even HAVE happy thoughts?"

"Kinda my point, actually."

"Nevertheless, Miss Evans, both the text and common knowledge indicate that Dementors induce an effect that makes a person feel like they'll never be happy again. The happy thoughts are gone."

"That makes no sense."

"As magical creatures, you will find that they operate under a different set of rules than normal beings."

"No, I mean your position isn't supported by my experience."

"Sit down, Miss Evans."

"Professor Lupin?"

"Yes Miss Granger?"

Hermione stood as I sat down. "I think what Holly is trying to say is that Dementors wouldn't want to take happy thoughts."

"Really? Explain. Perhaps we can learn a bit more by the discussion."

"Well, they're like mosquitoes, really."

The class laughed a bit, but Hermione soldiered on.

"A mosquito won't bite you in the nose, because there's almost no blood there. They can see the heat coming from your arteries where the blood they want is flowing, so they naturally are drawn there. That's what they want, and they're built to go get it. Dementors are parasites, like the mosquito. They don't bring up your happy thoughts for them to eat; instead they prompt all your worst memories to come to the fore. They feed off the negative emotions, so that is what they have developed the ability to find. It explains..."

"It explains why they went straight for me."

Hermione saw my haunted expression and gave my shoulder a squeeze before continuing.

"Yes, and it also explains why the only weapon against them is the Patronus Charm. The Patronus is the embodiment of a happy thought brought to life. If a Dementor fed on happy thoughts, the Patronus would draw them in like moths to flame or mosquitoes to blood, but the Dementor fled from your Patronus."

Professor Lupin is a very calm person, so his next statement could be seen as a loud cheer.

"Huh. Excellent reasoning and a good understanding of the material. 10 points, Miss Granger."

So maybe Lupin follows the papers and thinks I'm trouble. Hermione good, Holly bad. I can handle that.

Then we got into it over the Boggart.

Having me confront a Boggart looked to be a Bad idea. They take your worst nightmare and bring it to life in order to feed off the fear. Dementors are bad enough, but at least my worst memories are only forced upon me in my head. Boggarts throw that dirty laundry out for everyone to see.

Hermione was faced with an exaggeratedly cruel version of Prof McG telling her how stupid she is and that she failed all her classes. Neville gets haunted by the spectre of Snape. Parvati Patil was stunned into near petrification by a giant lumbering mummy, and poor Ronald was faced with an Acromantula. The sad thing for Ron is I've met Aragog, who exceeds Ron's nightmare spider in size by a factor of five. I chose not to inform him his true nightmare lives within 8 miles of his bedroom.

"You're next, Miss Evans."

"Not bloody likely."

"I assure you, the Boggart cannot harm you. We've seen it defeated by some of your classmates. Step up my dear."

Oh, he shouldn't have said that.

"Let me make myself clear. NOT BLOODY LIKELY!"

"Holly!"

I drew Hermione into a huddle. "Hermione, I can't do this here. Not here. Not ...with everyone."

Lupin spoke up to interrupt my conference. "Miss Evans, you will serve detention with me for the next week to remind you to keep a civil tongue. Leave the room."

He gave me the detentions for defying him, but it's basically acquiescing to my plea. 10 points from Gryffindor, though.

When I got there that evening, the Boggart was back in its box and he was standing there looking all smug. "It won't be so bad, Miss Evans. You should see about doing it next class if I'm right."

"I'll make you a bet- if the Boggart lives, I'll do it."

What comes out of the cabinet causes me to lose my cool and Lupin to cower urinating in the corner. My Boggart was a giant Naga-Basilisk version of myself, with Hermione's bloody body hanging from its venomous mouth, dragging along the bodies of Neville, Snape, Hagrid and Prof McG where a finger of my talons is impaled in each of their still living skulls. It bows before me saying 'my master Voldemort will enjoy these minds I have consumed for him.'

Except it wasn't.

That's what I thought I would see. I guess Prof McG included a 'no lying' clause in her Compulsion, as I feel the need to correct that last bit. Someday I'll figure a way to unravel that.

The truth, then.

It's Hermione. She steps out of the cabinet, stands there looking at me for a minute with this look of disdain. Then she speaks.

"You disgust me. You are a perverted freak. I can't believe I let a creature like you touch me. I can't believe you think you know anything about love or trust or friendship. I've just been using you to feed my interests, and to get closer to him."

That's when you step out next to her, holding her hand, only it isn't exactly you (I hope). It's a mixture of what I saw in the Mirror of Erised swelled fat and large like Dudley, dressed like Draco in pureblood finery with your hair slicked back. No, not yours; his. We'll call him Horror Harry. Horror Harry then smiles arrogantly. He pulls out a black wand and says 'Imperio' while pointing at Hermione. Hermione kneels before Horror Harry, unzipping his trousers and fellating him while he explains how he's also going to be taking her memories for his own, and when he's done with her he'll do it to me. I can see the silvery strands of memory being pulled from Hermione's head as if he were pulling out her hair. She starts to gag and choke. He's decided that I don't deserve education or freedom, and as the legitimate child his wishes are always carried out. Dark, hooded Auror/Obliviators appear from behind him, resembling the Dementors but laughing. They move at me fast and I find myself falling to kneeling with super-sized chains around my wrists, ankles and neck. I can hear the masses in the distance yelling "Thank God and Merlin for Harry Potter!" Harry grunts and pushes Hermione's face from his crotch and she falls limply to the ground in front of me. I see she's died choking on his phallus, semen spilling out of her slackened mouth onto the floor, her hair mostly gone. Horror Harry starts to suck the memories into his mouth like noodles. Harry oozes out his enjoyment of consuming Hermione's thoughts with a slimy "Soooooooo Nnniiiiice!"

Remember 'Nice equals Dumb'.

My mind initiated a diagnostic, you might say. I receded into my head.

Deep in my mind, I could see the tendril of the Boggart's attack like an elephant's trunk sucking pulses of colored emotion out of my head,

but it had lost the feed and was feeling about looking for more. I moved its vacuum tube end to point at a memory of Dudders in his yellow-pinstripe Smelting's uniform. When I opened my eyes, Dudders was there looking confused, saying I should bow before him. I get it now. I said 'Riddikulus' and the Boggart was slammed back into the waiting warded box.

Before I could pull my wand and let out my best Reducto, Lupin stood in front of me.

"Well I don't know which part was most disturbing for me. You handled it well, all things being equal. Do you still want to abide by our agreement? The Boggart yet lives..."

"Yeah it does, but there's no way I'll let one into my mind again."

"You may be right. It's a weak attack- all surprise but no real power. The only way it would prove significant in class would be if I were to spring one on you, and you'll be watching for that from now on anyway."

"Yes, I will." Lupin seemed to be reveling in his successful instruction. My simmering rage was beginning to break through my Occlumency-based calm.

"We could provide a show then. Have you cower in fear before a giant rabbit."

"Only if I can use the Holly Hand Grenade on it."

"Wouldn't that be Holy...ah yes. Good humor. I'm ...glad to see you recovering so well." Lupin turned away from me to carefully walk over to the warded cabinet and closed the physical locks.

My mask fell as my shields weren't needed with the Boggart sealed away. It was time to wake up the Professor.

"Fucking Bollocks! This was all some fucked up therapy session?! Stay away from me you bastard! If any of this reaches anyone else in the whole of Scotland I will see you screaming in pain!" As I rushed to

leave I grabbed a desk chair and flung it at him from across the room. He diverted it with a flick of his wand but said nothing, just looked at me startled, like he was surprised I was upset at him, of all people.

Four more detentions of this and someone was going to die. He at least had the good sense to cancel the rest of them. He's not dumb.

Which brings us to last night. In memoriam, or some such, I decided that Halloween would make an excellent opportunity for me to make an example of Marcus Flint, and to remind him that he does not safely walk these halls. As I said, Hermione and I had already Turned back to 11 PM after sleeping once through the night. We had split off as I had my trap to lay and she had something else to research in the library's Restricted section. I was heading back towards Gryffindor tower after finishing my work when I was waylaid by my favorite pair of carrots. Despite my Cloak, they grabbed me from behind with a tandem-whispered Accio Evans. Once they had hold of me they moved us all back into a passageway behind a suit of armour.

"Keep silent, Evans."

"You're being stalked..."

"...by a greasy scholar."

I pulled off the Cloak quietly, watching George look out a peephole as Fred kept a loose grip on my arms. After a minute, they settled back down and George pulled out a piece of parchment.

"Snape's heading down towards Slytherin."

"Good. Now what has you prowling..."

"...on this night of fun and frolic?"

I won't recount the exact details of the whole conversation. I miss the Quill. Anyway, the twins and I chatted about pranks and Flint and Snape until Fred mentioned something interesting. I'll write it Quill-style for clarity.



Fred: Y'know, I'm surprised Snape's patrolling tonight, as this should be Lupin's watch.

Holly: You have the patrols charted?

Fred: Of course! We just can't figure...

George: ...why Snape would do Lupin any favors.

Together: They hate each other!

Hermione's voice echoed from nowhere.

Hermione: It's because Lupin's a Werewolf!

Hermione made the most gratifying entrance at that point- she melted into view! The twins were so thrown they both ducked for cover, much to our amusement.

Fred: Merlin, Granger! How'd you learn the Disillusionment Charm? That's NEWT level minimum and the one that knocks most folk down from EE to Average!

Hermione: Necessity, Fred. Holly and I have a need to move unseen and she has an Invisibility Cloak.

God, I love her brain.

Fred: Oi! How do you know I'm Fred?

I answered that one.

Holly: Fred always speaks first.

Fred: I do not!

George: You didn't used to.

Fred: But you're right, I do.

At that point we all hushed up as a distant cry was heard from down the corridors.

Holly: Hmm, I didn't think Flint would be out now. My trap has sprung.

George took another surreptitious look at the parchment.

George: Yeah, but you caught Professor Garvin.

Holly: What? I set that to only trigger for Marcus!

George: That's his name; Marcus Garvin. Professor for the Politics and Law class.

Hermione: Oh, Holly! You should let him down! Thank goodness the trap was non-lethal!

George: It was?

Holly: At her insistence, yeah George.

Fred: Don't be too hasty to save Garvin. The reason you can't take his class is he only allows purebloods in good standing and sponsored half-bloods to sign up.

Hermione: What makes you think I'd take his class?

Holly: Hermione...

Hermione: Alright. Leave him then.

Holly: Don't feel too bad, Hermione. We'll just get Neville to sign up and then put on a Compulsion for him to take really exhaustive notes!

Fred: You can cast a Compulsion like that?

Hermione: Of course! Why else do you think that 'Fred always talks first'?

George: But how would you know which of us was Fred to begin with?

Holly: We didn't have to. We hit you both with the same Compulsion. We assumed at least you would know which of you was Fred.

Fred and George looked at each other, and then dropped to their knees in front of us.

F&G: We bow to the rightful heirs to the Marauders! We have been pranked!

Hermione: Who are the Marauders?

Fred: We'll tell you...

George: ...but only if you take off the Compulsions.

Short version for the rest; the Marauders were four students that created a map of Hogwarts and enchanted it somehow to show the presence of all the people within. It unfolds in various ways and places to reveal the different towers and such, and it shows the secret passages that provide shortcuts within the castle and out away leading to Hogsmeade and other surrounding exits of use. They identified themselves by the nicknames Moony, Wormtail, Padfoot and Prongs. Their map is extensive but incomplete, as I note the entrance to the Chamber of Secrets is not shown in Myrtle's lav. What makes this even more interesting is that Hermione overheard Snape refer to Professor Lupin as Moony while handing him a special-made potion yesterday. That prompted further conjecture given Hermione's previous revelation that Lupin is a Werewolf. Perhaps fortunately, I had to reveal my ignorance at that point.

"Well, OK. So ...is that bad?"

The twins gave me the deeper meaning- as a magical creature he has slightly less rights than Hermione has as an under-aged muggleborn. Also they suffer murderous rages during nights of the full moon; Hermione confirmed that Snape's potion for Lupin was a wolfsbane draught which allows the Lycanthrope to retain some measure of control.

In the meantime, Sirius Black had broken into the castle to shred the Gryffindor entry. Our late night bull session came to an end as the Weasley Wireless radios and certain statues all started to intone an announcement for all students to head for the Great Hall for their safety. We all looked at the Map to see the name Sirius Black entering a passage that lead to the Forbidden Forest. The name shifted to say Padfoot as it sped very quickly down the passage and away from the castle. All four of us looked up in surprise.

"Wicked!"

So Sirius Black and Professor Lupin were friends back in the day and compiled the Map with the help of two others named Prongs and Wormtail. Something about this seems so familiar that I'm now having a hard time reconciling the idea that a Marauder would sign up with Riddle. Death-Eater just seems to scream anti-humor, and these guys knew how to have fun, if the twins' tales have any shred of truth.

The twins surrendered the Marauder's Map in exchange for taking off the Compulsions and a promise to lend it back if they had a demonstrated need. I added that we may want them to keep an eye on us as they have interceded on my behalf at least twice before using the Map, and I owed them for that. George suggested that they would consider it settled if Hermione taught them the Disillusionment Charm. This led to a standing get-together for all four of us to meet on Sundays to trade spells and chase Peeves away from the Polka collection. The Marauders ride again, I guess.

Since we tracked Fred through the conversation, Hermione tagged him with a different Compulsion while they were bouncing around ideas for who the rest of the original Marauders might be- he will unconsciously stare and scratch his neck whenever he meets with a girl whose name starts with 'H'. Hannah Abbott should be pleased. Or confused.

After a quick check of the Map to note the corridor was clear, we headed off to the Great Hall looking like tired and compliant students. I whispered a suggestion that maybe we should free Professor Garvin anyway, but Hermione argued that he deserves it for disallowing students in his class based on prejudice, and it would still have the

terror-inducing effect on Flint I was looking for anyway. It warms the cockles of my heart when Hermione gets all Old Testament.

Holly

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## Chapter 19: Crimes Born of Passion

2nd November, 1993

Harry,

This is just weird, but I suppose it should be mentioned. I was sitting with Hermione as she was recovering, and I was teasing her about being curry-colored enough to join the Oompa-Loompas. She whispered that she was happy enough not having a 'badly-rendered spider-shaped winestain on her forehead' like Professor Garvin and stuck her tongue out at me, so I stuck my tongue out at her. Her eyes immediately goggled and she quickly clamped her hands over my mouth.

"Yu cnt pssbly be ffnded by ths! Yu wr jst dng it, tu!"

Hermione's rasping loud whisper almost sent me into fits of giggling. "Holly! Look at your tongue in the mirror!"

Hermione let go and handed me the hand mirror from her bedside table, then took a deep gulp of water to ease her throat. I did a typical doctor's office inspection move.

"BLAAAAGH!"

"Holly!"

I finally got why she was hyperventilating. The end of my tongue is split for the last inch or so. I can actually cross the two tips like fingers.

"What do you think this means, Holly?"

"It means that Parseltongue has certain physical requirements, which is probably why it can't be taught. It also means I'll never have to buy drinks for myself in the muggle world except in tattoo shops."

"And that you shouldn't stick your tongue out at anybody!"

"Hermione, do you honestly think I don't already freak the locals? The Little Whinging constabulary is convinced I'm a criminal mastermind for all the theft I accomplish there while stuck in Scotland. I'm the scapegoat of Surrey. BLAAAAGH!"

She laughed but it sounded like a cartoony snicker. I pray that her voice returns to normal soon. I miss her voice.

Holly

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6th November, 1993

During my run the night before last, it occurred to me that I almost lost Hermione- yeah, I know; 'Duh!'. Rather than it stirring up my thoughts with plots for revenge, I've been suffering a panic attack of sorts. I don't know if I could care enough about morals and ethics not to go on a rampage if I lost her now. I would have made sure Pansy's death shocked the nation, and I would have made sure to rape her mind for her co-conspirators if brought to that level of despair. Thankfully Hermione didn't die and Pansy is once again suffering in hospital much longer than she probably expected, as she's still there two weeks later. After I had worked out the timing, I realised that my punch didn't shatter Pansy's ocular orbit- that was administered later. Since her care under Poppy includes instructions that she not be allowed visitors or healing magics, I have to take this as Snape's version of just punishment while still retaining control of the power-politics lesson. If Pansy keeps crossing me like this I might finally smash her face into some semblance of beauty. It's a hobby project. For now, it looks like she's auditioning to be a cross-gender Quasimodo. She's not the real criminal, though. This scale remains unbalanced until more telling information comes to light. What I realised by the end of my run though, is that I'm not sure Hermione knows how much she means to me. Or to the survival of the human race. I needed to tell her.

Want to know how my first attempt went? We aren't speaking.

It started less-than-innocently enough. Hermione and I were looking over the Marauder's Map yesterday while monitoring our brewing in Myrtle's lavatory-laboratory, trying to understand how the Map tracks the various students. We discovered a few interesting things. For one, Flitwick's office does not reveal its occupants- we actually saw Professor Flitwick appear just outside his door and then disappear (no doubt going back for something he forgot) before reappearing a minute later and start to head to his classroom. Whatever monitoring charms make the Map work, the Marauders never tagged his sanctum, unlike the Headmaster's office or Prof McG's rooms. What was more interesting at that moment however was that the Prefects have an unusually large bath, at the time occupied by Oliver Wood and Timothy Dibny. Depending on when you looked at the names, Oliver's study partner looked to be occupied by Wood as well.

Hermione tried to find a less-compromising reason for their dots to overlap within the rugby-team-sized bath.

"Perhaps Oliver is teaching Timothy to swim?"

"I don't doubt there are breathing exercises in progress."

"Holly!"

"What? Why do you insist that this isn't exactly what it looks like?"

"Well, I realise Oliver is ...that way but I just...I would expect..."

"And how do you know Oliver is 'that way' anyway?"

"Well, when I was partly cat-minded, he was entirely unresponsive to my pheromones. How did you figure it out?"

I decided to forego confessing my sifting indiscretion and give the more defensible explanation.

"All evidence before us aside? Well, they've both seemed to be less affected by the Dementor chill than any other Gryffindor boys I've observed. It just makes sense from there."

"Still, they shouldn't be doing ...that. Certainly not in the Prefect's bath!"



"I'm sure they put up charms and sealed the door. Why are you squicking?"

"Why am I what?"

"Squicking. A squeamish ick-response. When something you see or hear about offends your comfortable reality enough that you feel like you're sucking on one of Professor Dumb's lemon drops too hard. Like this!"

I scrunched up my face and lips in that exaggerated sour flavor reaction you see cartoon characters make.

"Holly, there is no such word. Use another."

"This one works fine, thank you."

"You can't simply make up words! There must be a word or phrase that describes that without making up something that sounds so ...silly!"

"You may be experiencing squick as we speak."

"No I am not! Simply because there is no such thing!"

"Oh, surely! I can even expand its use! Squickiness; an event or series of events that induce squick! Squick squawk: wherein a person audibly responds to their squick with a squeak!"

Hermione stood up from our worktable and turned toward me, placing her hands at her hips to let me know she had a Declaration.

"Language isn't like that!"

I stood up as well, as form demanded.

"Have you been in the same Runes class I have? Language is exactly like that! Before there was writing, there was "Oooh!" which meant 'Good' and "Aaah!" which meant 'Run or we'll be eaten!'. Then some brilliant male proto-ape said "Uhhhhh, heh, heh" which meant

'Hey, baby can I plow your flower patch?'. Language evolved right then as the female proto-apes got together to figure out how to rate him as a prospect. With each nuance that was undefined, they had to invent a new word to distinguish a new meaning. So long as they all agreed "Unk-Unk" meant 'too many parasites', they were communicating. It only took a few generations for the males to catch on."

Hermione shut her eyes tightly and started to shake her head slowly.

"This offends me on so many levels."

I moved forward and put my hand on her shoulder.

"I feel your squick, sister."

Hermione glared at me and growled in frustration, clear indication that I was winning. That's when I started taunting her a little.

"Squick, squickem, squicker, squick-squicking, squick squickum!"

Hermione started to smile slightly, but her frustration was still evident.

"I am never letting you watch my cartoons again! I almost could accept it if you were just using it ...onomatopoetically!"

Hermione expelled a great sigh, as if she was releasing some pent up emotions. What really caught my attention was that a shudder passed through her. She was getting excited by this! I had to make sure.

"Wow. Nine syllables. Feel better?"

I moved close to her without touching her aside from where my chin almost rested on her shoulder and whispered "Maybe a little randy?"

Hermione closed her eyes, trying to fend off her rising embarrassment. She really was turned on by this discussion! I was getting warm myself, knowing how I was affecting her, so I moved forward with abandon (actually it was a step to the left) and kissed her. It was firm but gentle. A simple placing of my lips against hers.

When Hermione realised she was being kissed, her lips softened slightly and our kiss became deeper. I was amazed and charged up so I wrapped my arms around her middle and kept kissing her. Hermione sorta woke up a little and gasped, opening up her lips to release her warm sweet breath into my mouth, which just goaded me to go further. I stretched my tongue to lightly graze her teeth and then reach to tickle the roof of her mouth. Hermione responded by moving her own tongue to touch mine, and our kiss started to become fervent. All during this, she had lifted her arms into an aborted gesture of defense, and they stayed frozen that way until after a minute of our breathless deep-kissing she stepped back away from me and moved her hands to touch her lips.

Her eyes were wide with shock. She stared into my eyes, but I couldn't tell what she was feeling. One tentative reach of my Legilimency was shut down as she blinked forcibly.

I tried to use humor to recover the moment. It was a bad choice.

"So, are you feeling ...squick?

"Uhhh, I ...I have to ...go. Somewhere."

And then Hermione turned and walked quickly out of the room, her fingers still touching her lips. I watched her leave, frozen from reacting by her sudden departure. I remember feeling tears that streamed down both sides of my face reaching my chin at the same time to drop to the stone floor. I slumped down, deciding to join them.

That was the good part.

The bad part happened when we tried to discuss things this morning in Myrtle's lab. It was a short discussion. I was already in a bit of a snit, but Hermione just pushed all the wrong buttons.

"Holly, we shouldn't."

There was an empty pause. Hermione was looking down and I was puttering with ingredients.

"You'll have to be more specific Hermione. Which of our illegal activities should we be stopping?"

"We shouldn't...we can't be...(Sigh). You shouldn't have kissed me."

"I was expressing my feelings, as were you."

"Well, we can be forgiven for some youthful experimentation, but..."

I tossed the trimming knife to the cutting board and turned to face her.

"I thought you were concerned with illegal activities. This isn't even that!"

"The kiss wasn't illegal but if we go any farther..."

"Like you want to..."

"I don't want to! Or at least, I know I'm not supposed to want to."

"Is this your conviction or someone else's?"

"It's simply wrong! You know it, too."

I stepped forward to look at Hermione in the eyes.

"I know it? Why would I know it? I haven't been given a decent education on morals, ethics or proper behavior, as I was deemed a lost soul. My guide is entirely internal- everything else has been instruction manuals. I can't believe you are so entrenched into your pedestrian thinking that you can't even consider the possibility that you can enjoy ...b-being in love with me!"

"Are you suggesting I'm not smart enough to be a lesbian?"

Admittedly, this was a bad time for my whimsy to show up.

"Yknow, I've noticed most of the lesbians here are Ravenclaws..."

"Oooh! You know, with your upbringing, I shouldn't be surprised that your sexual identity has gotten confused..."

Which is when hurricane Holly finally reached full twist.

"IF you are about to suggest that the Dursleys have damaged me so much that I can't love properly, I will slap you HARDER than I did in front of the bookstore, when you were letting Lockhart's smile MELT YOUR BRAIN!"

Hermione gasped and raised her hand tenderly to her cheek, as if she could still feel the sting of that slap. Her look at me made me realise that at times, I frighten Hermione. She ran from the room and I haven't seen her the rest of the day. Somehow I can't bring myself to use the Map to look for her. Tomorrow's Saturday and the Quidditch match against Hufflepuff. If she shows up, we may be able to repair this. If not...

If not...

Despair, with a possible chance of Armageddon.

Holly

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8th November, 1993

Dear Harry,

If you were given the opportunity to give up something you enjoy for just the chance at getting something you want, would you take it? I would. I did. I didn't know that was the choice I was making, but I'm finding I regret the outcome less and less. I am banned from playing Quidditch competitively for the rest of my life, and Hermione gave me a kiss. Most of the trades I've made in my life are like that- it seems unfair on the objective analysis, but I know I got what was important to me. Hermione once suggested that I may have goblin blood, but I countered that my deals aren't grossly uneven to my side, so it'd have

to be very thin blood. We were teasing then, so she suggested that it might explain my height as well.

At the start of our Quidditch match against Hufflepuff, my spirit was close to breaking. I hadn't seen Hermione in the stands and the twins said that they thought she was in the library. Given she has the Turner right now, that was hardly proof that she wasn't planning on attending, but I couldn't find her and it was wearing on my soul.

The Hufflepuff matches tend to be more tactical, as their sense of fair play precludes them from taking desperate measures to damage the opposing players, and by tacit agreement we Gryffindors play by their style rather than use the advantage that aggressive play would give us. That puts more pressure on the seekers to catch the snitch quickly, as Hufflepuff teamwork is second to none. I was doing my level best to fulfill that need while still finding myself distracted trying to search the stands and edge of the turf for Hermione. I had nearly lost the snitch to Diggory twice that way, but snapped to the chase in time to intercept his run well enough for the snitch to switch out of our reach and disappear again. We were both circling upward as the last path of escape had led away from the ground when I felt the cold chill approach of a flight of Dementors. At the same time, I saw the snitch buzzing about 15 yards away and decided to forego subtlety and shoot straight for it. Diggory also caught sight of our golden target, but by then the Dementors were swooping in on me. I spiraled and swooped down evading their pursuit until I was able to settle down to a landing on the turf, the flight of Dementors having veered off. I was desperate to get an opportunity to clear my head of all the memories of screaming, but my teammates had other ideas. Two chasers plus Oliver all surrounded me, along with the Hufflepuff beaters and one of their chasers, and they all started arguing with each other and with Referee Rolanda as she had flown over to see what the ruckus was about.

There was such a cacophony of noise and emotion and all I wanted to do was go hunt down Hermione. I heard Angelina Johnson bellowing away and it just ...prompted an unexpected response.

"...you stupid flat-chested twat we haven't called a time out and Diggory's gonna get the snitch!"

"Oh for Hedwig's sake, just...COME HERE!"

I later found out that no one heard me say that; it came out as a bunch of clicks and a screech. That sorta makes sense, because the snitch then zipped straight into my hand. Everyone just sat stunned looking at the golden mcguffin twitching in my palm, but I had looked back to follow the course of its approach only to see that Cedric was looking at first frustrated, then frightened. I tossed the snitch aside and rocketed full blast away from the stunned crowd of players straight at Diggory, or rather, at the Dementor that was pulling Cedric's head back to suck out his soul. I learned a few things about...oh...three seconds later; Dementors should not to be grappled, as they are mostly insubstantial except for the cloak, face and claws. Also, if you are able to get a grip on them, the chill feels like falling into ice water because you are actually being frozen. One other thing-when you are being frozen by a Dementor, you often lose your grip on important things, like your broom.

End result; the Dementor was flying-tackled away from Cedric who escaped unharmed, my broom went awry and was snapped into pieces when it vectored too close to the Whomping Willow, and I'll be defrosting in hospital for a few days, having been caught from arcing 150 feet into the forest at 120 mph to my death by the Headmaster's bellowed Arresto Momentum. That's a spell I want to know- Physics? By your leave!

The twins swung by to inform me of my lifetime ban from Quidditch. My snitch-summoning has prompted a new wave of Holly-is-a-Dark-Practitioner press as most folk see wandless summoning as proof of advanced evil-ness training. Hearing that, I gave up on trying to convince anyone that it wasn't wandless magic but bird-speak; either way I'd have an unbeatable advantage as a Seeker, so I'm done. Why fight the inevitable? I did give the twins my plea to watch over Hermione for the next few days and they left with the Map in hand.

Then Hermione came to see me in hospital. I couldn't give her a stern look if I tried, especially while constantly shivering. Hermione swooped in to grab me in one of her best hugs, and she kept on hugging me and running her hands across my back and over my

shoulders, trying to help accelerate my recovery. Finally she leaned back to sit facing me and spoke.

"I was watching Disillusioned from the ground. That was the most amazing thing you did. I can't imagine how much courage you had to have to rush a Dementor, particularly after having faced one before."

"Yeh, I've-v-v-ve got j-j-just a b-b-b-bit-t m-m-m-more c-courage than s-s-s-s-sense."

"I...should try to see if that's why I'm a Gryffindor, too."

"Howzat?"

"I ...liked your kiss, Holly. I just didn't want to face it, as it meant too many other things."

"It only m-m-means w-w-we like each other, m-m-m-more than f-f-f-f-friends. J-j-j-just that."

"Really? Then I suppose I should let you know how I feel." Hermione leaned in and kissed me with some passion then, though I had to keep my jaw clenched shut. It kinda ruined the experience slightly, if not the meaning.

"Are you alright? You're all tense. Didn't you like it? Oh, I'm no good am I?"

"H'mione, s-s-s-s-stop!"

She just clamped her lips together and gave me a look of worry mixed with a deeper fear I was beginning to understand.

"If-f-f-f I k-k-kis-s-sed you the w-w-w-way I w-w-w-w-want-t-t to, I'd b-b-bite your t-t-t-t-tongue with my ch-ch-chattering."

Hermione smiled then, but then her face shifted into a look of anger.

"Holly, JUST WHAT THE HELL WERE YOU THINKING TRYING TO TACKLE A DEMENTOR?!"



Poppy Pomfrey erupted from behind another privacy screen. "That's it! Miss Granger, you must leave now and don't come back until tomorrow!"

Hermione's groaning matched mine.

"Awwwwww!"

"NOW, Miss Granger!"

Hermione left faster than if they said the library was burning. Warning to you; never piss off medical professionals. They know what powers they have and use them whenever they feel the need. It's a truth I'll have to use in the next life, because Poppy hasn't forgiven me yet in this one. I'm scheduled for four scalding sponge baths a day until my lips return to their normal color.

Holly

P.S.: Cedric swung by to thank me for 'saving his life or soul or whatever'. He said the Hufflepuffs have decided that I'm not a Dark Servant or anything. They're sure I'm just insane. He smirked a little then kissed my forehead and left. I admit, I swooned slightly, but Hermione has my heart.

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12th November, 1993

Harry,

The twins have forgiven me for missing our first Marauders revival meeting on Sunday- they sent me popsicles to wish me well, and I heard Lee announce a dedication to me on the Wireless; 'Ice, Ice, Baby!'. Damned song's been stuck in my head for days now. The meeting was fruitful for us all anyway, as they worked out some details from the Quidditch game that may become important. Hermione took the Compulsion off Fred as it really screwed up his playing; he's got a fairly deep scratch on his throat now, as every time

he saw me during play he was Compelled to rub it with a Beater glove or the Bludger Bat. More importantly, Hermione was able to get hold of the snitch and used Scarpin's on it. She detected an enchantment that would give off feelings of pain and fear, enough to attract Dementors to it like a blood trail for a foxhound. I suspect Slytherin involvement but once again lack of proof prevents prosecution. We'll just hold onto this in case we get a chance to match the spell with the owner of the wand that cast it, though I'm skeptical of this playing out meaningfully.

I still needed a replacement broom for quick escapes and the like, so after I was released from hospital I hung out with Ron for an afternoon to decide a balance of cost for acceleration and maneuverability. It turns out Prof McG has a keen eye- I decided on another Nimbus 2000, which I should be able to get used for around 150 galleons. With me off the team, it had to be my money. I just hope Prof McG took the cost of the first one from the school's coffers to satisfy my Basilisk-compensation agreement, as it ran 600 galleons when it was new. Dobby was summoned and when he appeared he looked all healed up for the 1/20th of a second I could see him before he buried his face in my robes, sobbing about how wonderful I was to think of healing him while in the midst of a crisis. I'll never suffer from esteem issues with Dobby around. I sent him with the Galleons and instructions for Florean to please see about buying the desired broom and 20 litres of Strange Chocolate. Last night Dobby reappeared with a broom and another quart container along with a note.

Holly,

My condolences on your Quidditch ban. I have taken the liberty of adding a self-shrinking/restoring charm to this broom. I'm certain it will last longer than your previous one if you watch where you're going a little more carefully.

Florean

P.S.: Chocolate LeStrange is too potent for large batches. Savor the flavor.

I noticed he still took out for five gallons of ice cream, but I don't begrudge him the handling fees.

In other news, Hermione and I have resolved that we are going to use the knowledge of Lupin's lycanthropy to see if we can force him to teach us the Patronus Charm. I was already wanting to learn this, but now Hermione has determined that its instruction is a necessary survival skill so long as Dementors and I occupy the same continent. Now that we've decided, though, the man has become as elusive as smoke. Hermione and I suspect that he may know Legilimency and had picked up our intentions before we were able to corner him. I should say he probably picked up on Hermione's intentions, as both my shields and my thoughts are difficult to penetrate for most anyone. We've resumed Mind Arts practice and Hermione said as much to me after our first session. Since then, I've learned how to lower my guard but still keep certain memories hidden from Hermione's stalking about in my brain. Occasionally I have fed her a memory or a feeling about our experiences together, to help her warm to the idea of becoming closer. She sensed my unsubtle ploy and talked about it with me this morning.

"Holly, I get it. You like me. I'm...flattered. You also mean the world to me."

"But?"

"But I don't think of you that way, or rather I don't think of girls that way. I mean I could feel...but there's no reason...and then there's the book..."

"Hermione, I know I've got you flummoxed when even full sentences become difficult for you."

"I just can't put myself into that role, especially when we're both so young. Why does this have to be resolved now?"

I decided I would step back to work out a better strategy at that point.

"It doesn't. I care for you Hermione. If I seem anxious about expressing it, please understand that it comes from knowing that you almost died a few weeks ago..."

"And you almost died last week! We're even."

"Exactly! No wait, what?"

"We're even! There's no need for you to feel like you owe me anything. We will be close no matter what! Now can we relax and just be friendly?"

"OK, Hermione. It's probably for the best. We'll keep it friendly."

Holly

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23rd November, 1993

Dear Harry,

Last night, I convinced Hermione that my version of friendly includes her getting multiple orgasms. We made love. It was GLORIOUS.

Today, though, we had to work out some issues.

I was awoken with a kiss, but as my eyes focused I could see Hermione was headed to the shower in a dressing gown. When she came back, she was already dressed and handed me the gown to clearly indicate where my next destination lay. After a warm cleansing, I returned to the room to find one of my normal outfits laid out on the bed, and no Hermione. I dressed quickly and headed out to the Great Hall. Hermione was already sitting in front of several plates of food, more than she usually has for breakfast though the porridge and pumpkin juice were set to the side in our usual indication of 'unclean foodstuffs'. I sat down next to her and simply turned to look at my dear friends face. After Hermione finished her current mouthful, she gulped loudly and turned to me.

"Good Morning, Holly. You'll forgive me, but I have a lot on my mind this morning. Perhaps our breakfast should be a quiet affair today."

"O-okay."

She said it very politely and with an upbeat tone, but I knew she needed space. The meal proceeded quietly, and I also found myself downing quite a bit of food. After 20 minutes, Hermione finished her last scraps of egg and turned to look at me, waiting for me to finish my current sample before speaking. With a swallow, I turned to look her in the eyes.

"Holly. Don't ...ever do that to me again."

I was one step from falling to my knees to beg forgiveness, to follow the sinking feeling in my heart.

"...until I ask you to."

I shuddered out my whispered response. "Christ, Hermione! My heart almost shattered!"

"I wouldn't doubt we're both feeling a little fragile."

I reached down to grip her hand in mine.

"I promise, Hermione. Whatever you want. No more, and no less." Tears streamed out of both my eyes just for a moment, and Hermione brushed one off my cheek with the hem of her sleeve. She gave me a wry smile.

"So much has happened. I need time to think. Will you be alright?"

"Yes, Hermione. I think I will." I gave her a hopeful smile and rubbed my eyes.

Hermione didn't say anything else. The rest of breakfast she sat quietly, mulling things over in her mind as she sipped her tea. I left her to her musings as I find watching her expressions quite enjoyable, and I know that pressing her when she's working something in her brain is asking for trouble. We spent our normal class time doing normal things, but barely anything was said that didn't relate to the class we were in. By lunchtime, I was beginning to get concerned, as

Hermione grew quieter and more...well...grumpy-looking. Finally, she pulled me aside after lunch saying she needed to ask me something. At first she looked like she wanted to confess something embarrassing, like she forgot her homework or peed her pants. Mostly I was dreading it being a 'this has been a terrible mistake' speech of some sort.

We found a private enough dead end and she nearly worked herself into a hysterical twitch walking back and forth without saying a thing except "I..." about 25 times, alternated with her giving me every kind of look I can imagine. I opened my mouth once to say something that hopefully would help move the conversation along, but she immediately put up her index finger to silence me- this was going to be her show. Hermione usually would stop her pacing to say "I..."

"I..."

"I..."

"I..."

Finally she turned and gave me a look like I had killed her family.

"YOU!"

Hermione rushed over to me to wrap her hands around my head, pull my face up to hers (she's still got four inches on me) and gave me a lovingly deep kiss. My heart melted. We two are one. Lycanthrope Lupin will be the first to face our combined might. But first we had to clean up a little as we both kinda slobbered on each other's faces. Hermione still held my face in her hands when she decided some actual discussion was needed, once we caught our breaths.

"Hooooooo! Alright, Holly. I can't deny this passion any longer. What we did was ...amazing. But it wasn't normal. What did you do?" She let her hands fall to her hips. I was momentarily confused.

"You ...you want me to describe cunni..."

"Magically, Holly! What did you magically do during our ...our..."

"Glorious Expression of Love?" My grin is painful. I'm not used to smiling that much. It's worth it.

"Yes! That! What did you do?"

"I...well, I used a Parsel magic technique I found in this book."

I produced one of my summertime discoveries from my satchel. Hermione looked down at the book, flipped through a few pages and shifted her weight to one hip. I know, because I was watching her hips closely when not staring at her mouth.

"This book doesn't say anything. It just looks like bad shorthand."

"It's called Parsing Parseltongue by John Gaunt, published 1884. It's in Parselscript so Borgin floated it to me for a Galleon. He bought it from Tom Riddle in 1949. Some other bloke, a linguist, bought it and returned it in frustration back in 1983."

"Holly! That's got to be a Dark Arts book! How could you..."

"Give me a little credit Hermione. The historical background section is quite specific about how the Parseltongue talent has been mis-identified throughout European history. The only spells you can do with Parseltongue are a few warding techniques and ...well ...sexual charms and enhancements. I suppose repressed Englishmen would consider that Dark. I've already memorized all 14 of them. There's a whole section about Mesoamerican cultures that Gaunt visited to cull these techniques. There the serpent is honored as a symbol of life and renewal, y'know?"

Hermione finished listening to my dissertation and shuddered. She grasped my shoulder to hold herself steady.

"Okay, I'm both appalled and moist. How do you do this to me?"

I shrugged sympathetically.

"It wouldn't be love if it wasn't confusing."

"So, um ...what did the spell that you used on me do?"

"Well, one allowed me to lengthen my tongue without thickening it overmuch so I wouldn't break your hymen."

"Thanks for that."

"Yah. The other one is a technique for sharing power with the one you love."

"Sharing power? Why would you do that?"

"Well, strictly speaking I've a bit too much of it lately. I've been practising with not speaking spells to help reduce power, but I still haven't gotten it under control, so I figured it would be okay to ...bleed some off to you."

"How much more power are we talking here?"

"Well, up until this morning I could probably take out that stone wall there with the Reducto I used last year to turn my trunk into splinters."

"You're fibbing!"

"Yes, I am. Had you going though!" (No, I'm not. ARRGH! Damned Compulsion!)

We both started giggling, which proved to be a welcome release of some of our tension. Hermione started up our new teasing pattern. You have to use more syllables than the last one used. She usually wins.

"Wench!"

"Hussy!"

"Charlatan! Really, what does it do?"

"Yeah, sorry. The technique just accumulates erotic stimulation fed by my feelings for you until it releases on a delay or trigger. Simple warding stuff turned into ...umm...an orgasm grenade."



"So what I felt.."

"...was all the orgasms I wished I could give you since we started sleeping next to each other in September, more or less, stored in my memories for just such an occasion." Why she couldn't figure I'd need to pass her significant power to pull that off I can't fathom. She may have simply been distracted. Hermione started to faint so I grabbed her into my arms before she could collapse.

"Ohhhhh, I'm moist again. Can we talk about something else?"

"Would you hate me if I said 'no'?"

"Umm, so what is the technique called?"

[pause]

"Holly?"

"Grimjack's ...Jolly ...Rogerling."

I gave her the best apologetic smile I could muster. I shouldn't have worried.

"Oooooooooohhh. MMMmmmMMM!. Umm...Arithmancy! Yes, Arithmancy! Done your homework, yet?"

"Yeh, that'll be a safe topic."

"Maybe for you...oh, fuck it! Where's the nearest closet?"

I Love Her. And she's becoming an amazing kisser.

We ended up using the Turner to make it for classes after all. My face hurts from all the grinning I'm doing. The firsties of all houses keep doing a headcount whenever they see me. I haven't been arrested so I assume they keep finding everyone. I'm not worried. Even under Veritaserum I could honestly say I hadn't eaten any of them.

Boy, I'm getting ...mouthy.

This afternoon, Hermione joined me in her bed for our second sleep period under the Turner. We held each other closely and with familiarity. Occasional shifts of position that caused the bumping of nipples or hands wandering to sensitive places were giggled away as just enjoyable friendliness. We both slept well, to the point where we almost missed getting up to turn back and attend the late afternoon classes. This is the way I want to live my life; in comfort and cooperation with the woman I love and trust. The rest of you can go fuck off. Sorry Harry, but you know I mean it because it's written in here.

Holly

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26th November, 1993

Dear Harry,

Why is it whenever I execute some masterful plan, something inevitably sends my intentions off in another direction? I never expected to fight a Basilisk when I went to see Prof McG. I never expected to face big Centaur parts when I was sent to the Forbidden Forest. I certainly wasn't expecting to uncover my family's sordid past just by trying to blackmail Lupin into teaching us the Patronus Charm. Turns out he's almost family. No wonder we don't get along.

We were able to lure Professor Lupin into a private meeting with us by having Hermione ask him nearly hysterically to come look at me, as I'd just expelled several black eggs- the truth is easier than a lie for leverage, especially for Girlscout Granger. They caught up with me huddled in a corner of an empty classroom near the DADA lab, still twitching with the aftershock cramps. Truthfully we hadn't planned it; when I started to feel the urge coming, I quickly spat out that this was as good a plan as any and sent Hermione with fresh images of my unfortunate biology in action to carry her hysteria.

Once they arrived, I was gratified to get quite a reaction from the Professor.

"Wow. Never seen that before. Do you know how this happened?"

At that point Hermione had sealed the room and I was shifting my body away from the eggs to clean myself up and put my bike shorts back on after a quick Tergeo.

"About the same way as the other ten times it did. Accio eggs. Tempus Advorsor." I put the eggs into a side pocket of my bookbag.

He actually started to growl.

"Look, you know we wanted to talk with you about something important and now we have your attention. Would you just listen for a bit?"

"GRRrrrrrrrOPEN the door. You do not want to test me. Open it!"

"Please don't be cross with us Professor, but we know the full moon isn't for three more days. Can we please just talk?"

"Ah, bollocks. It had to be you two. Alright, what do you want to know?"

Here's the tight version: Remus Lupin attended Hogwarts at the same time as James Potter, Lily Evans, Severus Snape, Peter Pettigrew and Sirius Black. At first, there was an Evans-Snape versus Potter-Black-Pettigrew rivalry, seemingly following lines of blood status. Shortly though, the second group came to the aid of a young mud-blooded werewolf whose curse was being covered up and managed by Albus Dumbledore. The lads took it upon themselves to learn how to be beasts as well, the better to accompany their smarter friend during his monthly terrors. They became Animagi; Potter was a stag, codenamed Prongs, Pettigrew a rat they called Wormtail and Sirius Black was a black dog (if ever Providence and Whimsey stuck together it was this time- of course he was a black dog) codenamed Padfoot. In addition to their altruistic urge to accompany their friend, they had developed a keen desire to sow chaos in the natural order

using their gifts, and spent many a night wandering the castle until they had an enchanted map to guide their mischief. Later as they matured, their rivalry with the Evans-Snape partnership took a different turn, as Lily Evans came to aid Remus in managing his curse in a different way; she taught him Occlumency, with much difficulty. This is where Hermione jumped in.

"Ooh! Ooh! I know why it was difficult!"

"Occlumency is a difficult skill in general, Miss Granger."

"If we're doing True Confessions, don't you think you should call us Holly and Hermione?"

"Then you should call me Remus or Moony, but not in class."

"It's better than my current name for you."

"Which is?"

"Oh, Holly don't tell him..."

"Professor Oatmeal."

"As I said, Occlumency is a very difficult skill. It can make you seem emotionless when in constant use."

"Really? Try mine."

"You found a teacher?"

"We're self-taught. Just try me. You have my permission."

The Professor drew his wand and pointed it at me.

Legilimens...thump.

"Good GOD!"

I stood up to walk over to where Professor Lupin was flung back after trying to come in the front door of my mind. "Here's a hand up."

Hermione looked torn between amusement and worry for overwhelming the teacher.

"As I was saying Professor, Occlumency is much harder for you because of your ...condition. Naturally, the art runs contrary to the powerful emotional influence of the Beast within, and it may present problems for Animagi as well..."

"Hermione, you sound like you're quoting again. Skip to the end."

"Well, umm, it sucks to be you, Professor."

I couldn't stop laughing for the next five minutes and only ended because I needed a break to handle another wave of cramps. Lupin took it well after a grumble. Hermione: 5 points, Holly: 3 eggs, Lupin: 0 respect, not even from the Gryffindor sisters.

Back to History of the Marauders:

Lily's additional mentoring of Lupin caused tension from Snape and Potter both, as neither were pleased to see the belle of Hogwarts with a ...creature. This rift caused a refocusing of efforts for all involved. The Marauders took torturing Snape as an overall mission, with Snape returning fire more often than not, Potter took a personal vow to woo Lily to their camp and hopefully his bed, and Lupin stuck with his friends. Eventually Potter won over Lily's affections and Snape retreated to his Slytherin fellows. Roll forward a few years and Lupin was being sent on missions against the Dark Lord, James and Lily tried to make a life together even while aiding the fight, and Peter and Sirius tagged along, with Sirius training as an Auror with James. The night of all the trouble, Sirius betrayed the Potter's secret hideaway to Riddle, Peter caught him out afterwards and Sirius killed him and a bunch of bystanders in a giddy release of magical mayhem, or so the tale is told. Remus wasn't around for any of the last month of drama, and found himself once more without friends in the wake of that terrible night.

"So where do you figure I fit in all this?"

"I really don't know. I wouldn't have guessed that Lily would betray James to the point of bearing someone else's child, though with James in Auror training, a lot could have happened. After retelling this story, I'm finding it hard to believe anyone's behavior was normal back then, except maybe Peter's. I mean, Lily unfaithful? Sirius aligned with He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named? James unaware of Lily having an early pregnancy? I'd almost believe they held your existence a secret because of the war, but then why let out anything about Harry? It doesn't add up."

"Why are you here now, and not twelve years ago, or three years ago? Once it was known I was Lily's child, didn't you want to meet me?"

"I did, but I was warned away by the Headmaster. Hermione is right; it does suck to be me. I have fewer rights in this world than she does. I'm here now because Dumbledore saw the value in facing one Marauder with another. I'm here to defend you against Sirius Black."

"Thank you for sharing this with me. We would like one other thing, if you wouldn't mind..."

It took some cajoling, but Hermione and I convinced Professor Lupin to teach us the Patronus Charm AND about becoming Animagi. We start training on the Charm next week, but the potions to find your form take about six weeks to prepare, so we won't get to try it out until after the holidays. I'm surprised they aren't in Moste Potente Potions That Brew Like Molasses Runs In Winter.

Holly

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29th November, 1993

Harry,

Lupin's lessons are good, but this last one he held me back for a discussion of what might best be described as 'unfortunate possibilities'.

"Miss...ahhh...Holly. I wanted to talk with you about some things we didn't cover when you..."

"Blackmailed you, yes?"

"Right. First thing. Those eggs were real, weren't they?"

"Ummm....yes. I would appreciate it if you didn't tell anyone about them."

"Oh, believe me, I won't. It leads me to bring up the next point. You see, I know how hard it is to operate in this world as a Magical Creature rather than a wizarding citizen. Who else knows about these...eggs?"

"Hermione, you, me and Harry."

"Why Harry? More importantly, how Harry?"

"I have a journal given to me by Professor McGonagall that allows me to write in it and what's written shows up in Harry's copy. His doesn't show up in mine, though. Actually, I'm not even sure he reads it, spicy novel that it is. Prof McG also played a prank on me when she gave it to me so that I'm Compelled to write in it regularly. Resisting the urge helped me to build up my basic Occlumency defense."

"That's nearly unprecedented. Minerva pulling a prank...huh. Probably a Protean Charm, that would explain why only one-way. If it were two-way, they could be used to track the match in the set. Anyway, what I wanted you to understand is that you mustn't tell anyone else about these eggs. If you were reclassified as a Magical Creature, you'd lose all your rights and most likely end up deep in the Ministry being poked and tested for the rest of your life."

"Is that the end of your happy news?"

"No, I had another thought but it can wait."

"Oh, please, serve it up happy Oatmeal Man."

"The most logical possibility I can believe is that Sirius Black is your father. I doubt he knows it, or at least he probably didn't know it until he was out in the world to read about you."

"Wow, you are just the harbinger of good times. Have you ever seen Empire Strikes Back? I'm feeling a kinda deja film echo."

"I'm afraid I've really lost touch with the younger generation."

I can just hear it now:

'No, I AM YOUR FATHER!'

'Whatever. Eat sword.'

Holly

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1st December, 1993

Dear Harry,

Well, for our latest session with Lupin, my progress in turning a white mist into something solid was interrupted by renewed banter about the dirty dog that may be my father. Sirius Black once more made it into the castle and into the Gryffindor dorms, but he ended up being chased out of the 3rd year boys' dorm after Seamus, Neville and Dean woke to find the scraggly fugitive holding Ron over his own bed ranting "Where is he?! Where is he?!" Knowing that Harry would have been a third year leads us to believe that that's his focus in breaking into the castle. I guess even to insane mass-murderers I'm just not that much of a priority. Our guess is that Sirius doesn't know or isn't thinking well enough to reason it out. If he had even that much brain power, he would realise that you wouldn't be bunking with the common folk.

I only bring this stuff up because of a decision I have to make.



Lupin suggested he couldn't guess why Sirius would want to break into the boys dorm if not for Harry, and I followed up by saying "Yeah, there must be an easier way to get a date."

Hermione then piped up "Oh! I was going to remind you to ask Dean for a date!"

Lupin and I looked at each other and then at Hermione. Even he can tell Hermione and I are together, even if the love of my life hasn't quite agreed to it.

"Really. He doesn't seem to be involved with anyone right now, and we have some time. You could go to Hogsmeade...Oh wait, you don't have a signed form. Well, you could offer to spend time with him on Saturday anyway. It should give you both enough time to see if you're compatible."

"Me dating a boy; you actually meant that?"

"YES! And you promised you'd give it a fair attempt."

"Oh. I guess I did at that."

"You did?"

"Stay out of it, Oatmeal."

"Didn't say a thing."

Hermione has the cutest smile when she's enthused. I guess I'm going to go seduce a boy. It's like a quest.

Holly

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Spiral Tangent: Please read Tangent '9311 - Glorious' for details on H&H's first intimate encounter. There is humor along with the erotica.

Author's Note: I apologise for anachronistically referencing The Emperor's New Groove during Holly's 'squick' speech. Just assume Hermione has some other, British cartoon involving squirrel-speak in her collection at home that Holly saw while crashing at the Grangers.

John Gaunt could have simply been the ancestor of the Little Hangleton Gaunts until I referenced Grimjack. That character was invented by John Ostrander and while he wasn't a Parseltongue or born in the 19th century in the comics, the way Cynosure works he may be the same character anyway.